

N. 8 Holiday Number 15 CENTS

SMITH'S

MAGAZINE



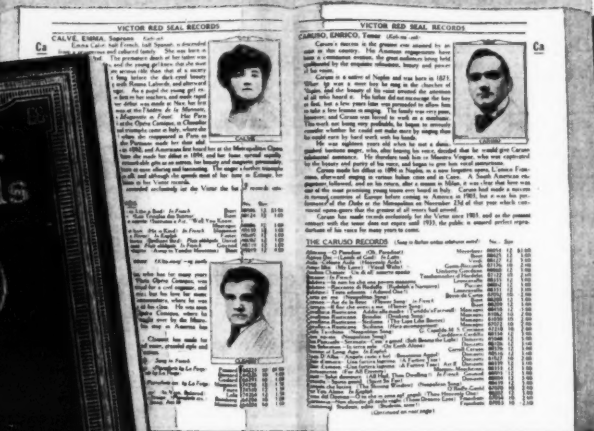
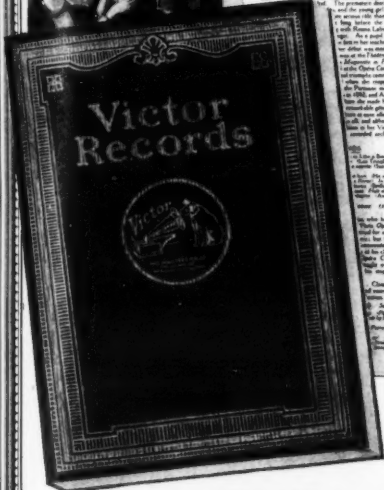
"Half a Man"

is the mystifying and wholly suitable title of an absorbing new story written by JOSEPHINE A. MEYER for the readers of SMITH'S. With more than ordinary pleasure we present this new author. She is already a clever actress and playwright, and fiction readers are likely to hear more of her. She knows real drama and how to present it. If you care to read a baffling, unusual story, get the February number of SMITH'S, and turn to Part I of "Half a Man." You will need no urging to read the remarkable conclusion of the story in the March number.

Among the other notable things coming next month are "The Real Thing," a vivid story of genuine power, by Marie Manning. "Dear Old Dick," a delightful love story, by the Williamsons. "The Prevarications of Nancy," a college-girl story, by Laura Ladd Lummis. "The Dream Life of Jane Dorr," a serious study of a woman's heart, by Amanda B. Hall. "On East," a humorous Western story, by Caroline Lockhart. "The Plastic Percita," a moving-picture studio story, by Winona Godfrey. "T-T-Tommy," a charming little-boy-and-love story, by Lucy Stone Keller. "The Footpath Way," the conclusion of this splendid serial, by Anne O'Hagan. "The Crowning Charm," a little love story, by Virginia Middleton. Doctor Whitney's article on health and beauty, and two timely and thoroughly interesting talks by Emily Newell Blair and Hildegard Lavender.

Variety—did you say? You will be delighted with the February number of SMITH'S. On the news stands January 5th.

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Vol. XXVI

SMITH'S MAGAZINE

No. 4

A PUBLICATION FOR THE HOME

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Charles A. Towne

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work, or how far you can go without becoming tired. Next to two five-grain tablets of Nuxated Iron three times per day after meals for two weeks. Their test of strength again and see how much you have gained.

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SMITH'S MAGAZINE

Volume 26

JANUARY, 1918

Number 4

A Christmas Altar

By Grace Margaret Gallaher

Author of "Old Fires That Smoulder," "The House of Flowers," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY CLARENCE ROWE

How the story of the Great War, told by a wounded soldier, brought to a New England girl and her lover the most wonderful Christmas of their lives.

I 'LOW I got a piece o' news for you this mornin' that'll make your eyes shine." Bartlett Medberry set the milk pails on the table with care.

Polly stopped in her flight from pantry to stove. The dish towel slipped from her hands, and she cried out upon him impetuously:

"What?"

"Give you three guesses," while he stood delighting in her quivering eagerness—the joy of living that made her a dancing flame on his sober path.

Polly was in no mood, this driven morning, to wait upon Bart's jogging habits.

"I s'pose you've got to be just so mod'rate if Book Hill was a-blowin' up in a volcano! Well, ol' Miss Fanny Howlett's tokened to be wed, Uncle Hiram Deeds has give his nephew that money he's owed him thirty years, an' the Parson Starr place has got a buyer."

Having run the range of village miracles, Polly laughed in restored sweetness and listened for the real event.

Bart laughed, too, so that for a mo-

ment he could not speak; then he said, in his deep voice that was like a great bell ringing softly:

"You're a witch! Let Chapman wants to buy the Parson Starr place."

The color dropped from Polly's cheeks.

"Buy it!" she murmured in a kind of terror.

"Offers one thousand dollars for it, just as it stands."

"What he want of it?" Not that it mattered at all, just to catch at something.

"He's a-goin' to turn Blue Pool over a dam an' make a mill o' the house. He deems those great old rooms——"

Polly shrieked as if at the profanation of a holy place.

"Make a mill out o' my great-grand-sire's house!"

Bart sat down in the rocker and pulled off his coat, cap, and mittens. He saw he was in for it with Polly, and though he had no fear of the issue—when had he ever met defeat?—he was a man who liked to take life, in his own phrase, "without a commotion."

"He's got the money all ready an' he's a-comin' up here to obtain your signature to the deed."

From the middle of the kitchen floor Polly continued to stare at the big, fair man as if she saw him for the first time. Every fresh instance of his immutability did make him strangely an alien.

He waited now, smiling. Never the one to end a silence, he could sit tranquil till his adversary broke down in sheer "nerves."

"I told you I didn't want to sell the Parson Starr place!" she cried out now.

"You can pay off the last o' your debt, an' you can get you a real good settin'-out, too, now." The keen blue of his eyes filmed to softness; his smile was potent with charm.

A faint rose crept back to her cheeks to acknowledge this, but she still cried out strangely:

"I told you I didn't want to sell the Parson Starr place!"

"Let tried to beat me down on the price, but I made out he was in a reg'lar collar pucker to get it, so I nailed him to the thousand."

The girl looked out of the window to the winter world beyond the farmhouse, a dazzle of blue-white snow, of sky like a turquoise on fire, and of sun that smote with the scimitar of his light every corner and hollow. The shining beauty of it bruised her soul as if she had laid a wounded finger for healing upon a sparkling diamond.

She turned back to the kitchen humming with warmth and spices, with scents of good things brewing. Here was her homely battlefield. Alas, she was like the clans of the Gaels! They always went forth to battle, but they always fell.

Yet how good Bart was! He respected her honor about her debt and waited for her to pay it herself, although they had been tokened two years

and he himself could have cleared it off in one season's harvest.

In concession to this goodness, she explained:

"The debt's 'most paid up—I'll have the last of it ready by plantin' time. Then, 'tween that an' hayin', we can—get wedded. I don't need any great of a set-out."

"I should think you'd have your pride about things, like other girls. Sister Carrie had a three dozen of everything. As I remember, she was a whole year stitchin' an' markin' an' tyin' her trade up in ribbons."

"Oh, forever!" as a picture of Carrie, "prim as a dish," rose before her ardent eyes. Then, remembering that the Medberrys respected possessions as if they were sentient creatures, "I got things. There's the towels an' sheets Aunt Susanna left me, an' the quilts I've pieced evenin's, an'——"

She stopped, because she saw that he was not paying the least attention to her.

"The old place's a big bill o' expense every year for taxes." He sailed serenely into the gap. "Pleasant Valley is a-histin' the rate up a notch a day."

That was how he always won—by refusing to fight and taking victory as a fact accomplished. She sat down, in futile imitation of his calm, her knees a-tremble, her voice like a taut string.

"Bartlett Medberry, you're twelve years older'n me, an' you've been my guarden ten years afore ever we were tokened, an' you've been just, an' you've been awful kind an' helpful, an' for the most part you've understood——"

He opened his eyes drolly at the list of his values.

"Pretty high certificate o' character you're makin' out for me, Miss Starr," he laughed.

Out flung the scarlet flags in her cheeks, high burned the fires in her eyes; she looked beautiful and dangerous.

"An' you've done what few men would have—lettin' me stay right 'long here in Aunt Susanna's place an' use her milk an' eggs, an' you take all the care o' the creatures same as if she was livin' still—" The fires died down, drenched in a flurry of tears.

Bart crossed over beside her and put his hand on her shoulder—in one of the "dumb Medberrys," a token of deep emotion.

"Look a-here, child"—his little name for her—"we've threshed that all out between us, afore now. You were bound girl to Aunt Susanna in law, but she set by you like a daughter an' you did a daughter's part to her more'n most daughters, too—for after she'd loaned you the money she had ought to have *gave* you to go learn nursin', an' you'd had a year at a great hospital an' had got a place with big wages, she called you home to take care o' her, an' you came a-flyin' an' tended her hand an' foot for five year when there wasn't any more ailin' her—"

"Why, she was awful sick! 'Twas her nerves!" in innocent sympathy.

"Nerves! The cat's tail!" the scorn of the healthy man. "Well, she died finally of a cold she got a-visitin', an' lef' every stick an' stone on the farm an' penny in the bank to that niece to Zoar that didn't make enough of her to come to the funeral. If it warn't for gettin' up the Medberrys' name in the community—I'd 'a' broke the will, if I *am* administrator."

"She was Aunt Susanna's own kin, her only sister's child."

"Kin! Them are kin to me who are kind to me," unwittingly Shakesperean. "But that's neither here nor there. I told that niece you'd got a claim to stay in this house for a year, an' I made her 'gree to it, too."

He looked a big and formidable adversary to terrify any grasping niece from Zoar. The sword dropped from Polly's hand, the battle light died in her

eyes; she looked up all sweetness and gentleness and that mysterious loveliness that made her ever alluring, ever eluding like a woman of a dream.

He ruffled her soft hair back from her forehead, wondering, as often, where she got that black hair with those violet eyes.

The warm old kitchen was very still for a moment, listening while one of "the mightier movements" passed. Bart swung back into the commonplace first.

"I got the laugh on Let. He wanted to bring the check right up to-day and get the deed, but I told him it wouldn't be any more legal than if 'twas Sunday."

"Why not?"

"December 25th, child! Christmas Day!"

"Christmas Day!"

The words dripped cool on Polly's mounting anger. The Medberrys never kept Christmas; they had no gracious yuletide traditions—scarcely any Christian ones—and since she had lived with his kin, she had trod in their dull paths. But dim and far away, never to be quite caught, were visions of an earlier time when Christmas had meant lights and colors and a tall tree glimmering with toys and every one laughing and singing. Bart, to whom she had once tried to describe these misty memories, termed it "a shaller piece o' business," and she never spoke of it again, but the touch of that vanished hand drew her every year to a shy little celebration—something special for dinner, her best frock worn on a weekday, a trail of ground pine around the clock.

"You comin' here to dinner to-day?" she cried warmly to him now. "I got a real surprise for you."

Their simplicities saw nothing out of the way in his coming alone to her house for a meal. He had been tramping across the meadows from his house



496 She walked up the path, swept clear of snow by the freakish wind, where once her great-grandmother had tended ribbon borders, to the stately steps.

to do her "chores" every day since Aunt Susanna had died.

"Can't to-day. I got to cut timber over Seven Days' way. Keep it for to-morrow, when Let comes. He'll be nigh tuckered out with that rough tug up Book Hill, an' he don't get such cookin' as yours to his house."

She stamped the compliment under her feet.

"I ain't a-goin' to sell my Great-grandsire Starr's place!" she shrieked at him, once more aflame.

Bartlett sighed. Dear and desirable as Polly was, she had her tantrums, and it took judgment to keep her from flying all hitherty-yander.

"Your father left the estate at the disposal of your guardeen till you are married, an' then at the disposal of your husband," he said mildly. "So, any way it's fixed, I got a legal right to sell it." He began to draw on his coat.

She flashed across the room as if the wind of her wrath had blown her thither.

"Not without my signature, you can't, an' I'll never give it less I'm bound an' gagged!"

She dared him to commit violence upon her.

Bart smiled patiently at memories of a kicking, screaming child he had held back from jumping into mill races or climbing to the barn ridgepole.

"I deem Let will be along just about noon, so have that special dinner all hot for him."

She saw the scene laid for the oft-played comedy—or was it tragedy?—of her life. Bart, big, forceful, serene, with the deed; Let, ferret-eyed for any crumb of gossip about First Selectman Medberry and the gypsy girl he was going to marry; and she, outraged, but—for love of Bart or fear of "getting her name up" or habit of submission to a masterful man or—what? Anyhow, she would sign.

She smote her hands down upon his shoulders, sword swift.

"You think, when you have Let Chapman a-settin' here, I'll sign rather'n make a commotion before him! I tell you, if the whole of Pleasant Valley is jammed into my keepin' room—an' all Zoar, too—I won't sign that deed!"

Bart took his cap from the nail where he had hung it.

"The old place's been empty nigh a quarter o' a century an' it's all o' a ramshackle; it's way off the main road an' it's eatin' its head off in expenses," he said with strong deliberation. "Why, in the name o' old Hewdie, do you want to keep it?" Now his voice sounded like a bell tolling.

"It belonged to my Great-grandsire Starr."

"Tain't as if you could call to mind dwellin' there, an' tain't as if you were ever a-goin' to live there. I've got a proper nice house all complete for you."

Polly's luminous eyes clouded with pain at his lack of understanding; yet, because he was taking the rare trouble to reason with her, she spoke out of her heart's deep places as never to any one before.

"Folks laughed at my father because he loved music an' hated farm work, an' they called him 'Fiddlin' Fred' an' 'Fallin' Starr,' an' nobody could give any 'count o' my mother, except she gypsied into town one day an' her name was Mary O'Conner; an' I was lef' without any kin afore I could tell time a'most, an' bound out by the town to your Aunt Susanna for my work an' keep."

She panted with the speed of her speech, and Bart stirred restlessly. Why did women love to raise old ghosts?

"That's all folks in the valley know about me to-day, an' they feel that it ain't fittin' for Bart Medberry to be

tokened to a girl that's—nobody an' got nothin'!"

"Pretty near all the boys have strove to take my place," interrupted the man coolly.

She swept on.

"That's me—Mary Starr, just poor odds an' evens o' nothin'ness." Her lips quivered, her head drooped; then she reared it like a soldier. "But my Great-grandsire Starr was parson in this valley for fifty years an' rich in his own right an' a member o' the legislature an' honored an' loved so by his folks that when he was too old to preach the Word to 'em any more, they built him a grand house by Blue Pool an' to his heirs forever. An' his son kep' it; an' *his* son—poor Fiddlin' Fred—he kep' it when he hadn't wood to light a fire on his hearth; an' I'll keep it while there's blood in my body. The old place—why, that's the whole race of Starrs forever!"

She looked her name, radiant, illumined. But Bartlett Medberry said, in his kind, matter-of-fact way:

"You'll be Polly Medberry afore spring, an' I guess that name'll pass anywhere in this valley."

She could have wept in pathetic helplessness at his "numbness." All the passion for a "bit of land" far down in the blood of Mary O'Conner's nation, all the pride of birth of the old parson, beat tumultuously within her, and he thought to bind it in with a circle of gold no bigger than her finger!

"I'm born a Starr—I'll die a Starr, if I was to wed every man in the valley!" she flung back at him.

Bart opened the door.

"Let will be 'long about noon to-morrow," he remarked, as if it were a statement about the winter chill that swept into the entry.

Polly snatched the door out of his hand.

"Listen to me!" Her voice was so quiet it surprised him into attention.

"I've done everythin' you ever told me to for the last fifteen years, though sometimes 'twas like cuttin' me with knives to do it. You *made* me. But I'm through. I won't sell the old place."

"By the terms o' your father's will ——" he began heavily.

"You goin' to hold my hand an' make the marks on the deed, same as I was a child?" she taunted.

"A wife wants to do as her husband thinks best. He's her head."

"I ain't your wife, an' I got a head o' my own, thank you!"

"It's a terrible light one, if it makes you throw up an excellent good bargain, one that won't come again in a century, for a whimsy-whamsy 'bout an ol' house that's only fit for an owl's roost."

Polly tossed the head in question with a jet of laughter that made the man long to shake her till it bobbed.

Instead, he said, with a hard force on each word:

"I'm a-goin' to bring Let Chapman up here to-morrow at twelve prompt. You'll sign that deed then."

A dreadful fear clutched at Polly. She would sign. Then fear flung back upon itself in fear so great that it was desperation.

"I shan't be here to-morrow. I shall be gone clear off all day."

Bart smiled, and that smile was his undoing.

"I'm goin' *now*!"

"Where you goin'?"

"I don't know—I don't care! I'm a-goin' to take my foot in my hand an' *leave*! You're just a tyrant, an' I *won't* stay!"

He pushed her up against the wall very gently, and his gentleness was the measure of his anger. His fair, handsome face was a high scarlet and his placid blue eyes flamed.

"If you set more by that ol' ramble-to-ruin place than you do by me, that'd give you my name an' home—go! But



He told it with the magic of a nation of story-tellers, his young, gaunt face as fierce as a sword, and he told it to a heart deep-walled with pity.

don't you come a-runnin' to me when you find yourself in trouble."

He held her loosely, yet securely, as if to show her that she could not even run away without his will; then walked out and down the path.

Polly watched his big, solid figure across the meadow out of sight. Then she sank down on the lounge by the window and laughed tremblingly, for that was the way emotion took her. She and Bart had quarreled since the days when she had had to stand on a stool to beat eggs in the cake bowl, but

never to this margin. And she had always given in and been forgiven. But this was the end.

She finished the morning work in a passion of speed, but with the nicest care. That niece at Zoar should not say the house was left a "hurrah's nest." Then she dressed herself in her best clothes, took a bundle of needments, and another of food for all day. Last, she thrust a note into the handle of the milk pail, where Bart would see it when he came to do the milking. It began without salutation:

I'm going away like I said. I left my clothes and my few other things packed up in the trunk in my chamber. I'll send for them some time. Take Bounce and the cats over to your house. All the money for the butter and eggs I've sold since Aunt Susanna died is in the blue teapot on the keeping-room shelf.

POLLY.

She meant to add something more about his kindness in former days, but the sound of bells suggested Violetta Brown on the way over from the hollow, and she dashed down her name and ran out by the back door.

She fled over the thin-crust snow till she was across the ten-acre meadow and hidden in the dip of the lower pasture. The air was as clear and brittle as glass, the clouds glittered in a high sky, and the sun was a blinding splendor. The day had that wonderful life-giving power to be found only in rare winter weather as if it were charged with some ichor of the gods.

Polly was all pure joy. The little gray house clinging to the hillside, so full of her days it seemed her shell, the steady round of serviceable hours, even the man who loved her, were all dropped soundlessly into the white sea of forgetfulness. The gypsy blood that had lured her mother from the cabin in Connaught half around the world, that had made her father a rover on the mountains, surged within her and urged her flying on the trail of rapture. She tossed her bundle into the air and caught it like a juggler; she jumped over stones and slid on sheets of ice; and all the time she sang a sweet and tuneless murmur.

Where the pasture darkened into forest, she did dwell a moment soberly upon her future, looking up into the tall pines glinted through with the blue of the sky.

"I'll go on to Center Mills an' get me a place nursin'. I haven't lost all I learned, in these five years."

Then she laughed again and strode merrily forward.

The forest sloped suddenly into Blue Pool. Polly knew it was there, yet cried out in the surprised joy of it. Blue River rolled and leaped and roared over icy crags for miles, to fall into a strange enchantment in a wide cup as blue as sapphire, as still as fairyland.

She hung over its pellucid profundity as if in its crystal she saw the shadowy footsteps of the days to be. Then, lightly reckless, she crossed the ruined bridge to the old Parson Starr place. On this rim of beauty, the old parson had chosen to end his days, and here stood his fine old house, lifting a noble tower to front the mountains.

Polly swung the gate to and fro as she gazed far down to where the once thriving town, now shrunk into a hamlet, burrowed in its winter comfort. The church spire gleamed against the snowy hill, and a spiral of smoke mounted from some snug chimney, but neither sound nor motion stirred the stillness.

Tiny spot of life though it was, it made Polly's world. Only once—in her year at "the great hospital," an institution with forty beds—had she ever been beyond it. Through it, slowly, in drops, flowed the news of mankind. Ah, slowly! For her cloistered life kept her from church and sewing society, she took no papers or magazines, and the long pull up Book Hill discouraged all but hardy visitors. The agonized voice of the world in its hell torment reached her only as a sleepy drawl.

She turned from the village to look up at her own castle, royal still even in its dilapidation.

"That's the west parlor, where great-grand sire had the president to dinner after the sea war with the British; an' that's the dining room, where all the ministers in the county used to take supper once a month; an' that window up there's where I was born."

Time was short if she meant to catch the stage to the junction, yet she must

say good-by to this house of her race, this altar of her pride. She walked up the path, swept clear of snow by the freakish wind, where once her great-grandmother had tended ribbon borders, to the stately steps. She murmured as if to the shades of her ancestors:

"It wasn't just pride that made me do it. I couldn't ever have any free will with him. He was just a master hold-in' me down."

She brushed aside the picture of Bart wounded in the house of his friend lest it darken the day, and entered jauntily upon her inheritance.

"I'm goin' to take my dinner at my great-grandsire's table," she laughed. "My Christmas dinner!"

She stepped through the ruined door and stood blinking in the dusk till the shadows shifted to show her that she was not alone. A tramp sat on the floor, his back to the wall, and smoked his pipe at his ease. A friendly soul, evidently, for he called out at once:

"Merry Christmas!"

Polly started. This greeting in the home of her ancestors!

"Merry Christmas!" some one answered. Could it have been she?

"How you come here?" asked the tramp genially.

The growing light showed him to be just a tall boy, very thin and white, as if sick. She had no fear of him.

"It's my house."

"Oh, no, it ain't! I found it a whole hour ago."

Polly was in no wise affronted at this claiming of a common bond of tramping. Adventure leaped in her.

"My great-grandsire built it."

He was unimpressed.

"And a good piece o' work he made of it. Can I warm me an' rest me in your grand house?" He had an engaging voice and smile.

"I guess I'll rest me, too." They sat

one each side of the fireplace on the floor.

"You come far?" as a beginning to friendliness.

"Some hike. Over those hills behind from the junction below. An' I'm due to catch your stage on to some corners if I want to get any train that'll fetch me home Christmas night. It's a bully day to be movin'."

She studied him while he talked. He wore a brownish suit of clothes, with many pockets, and gaiters to the knee, under a caped overcoat. His clothes were old and faded, but very clean. His face she marked most. It was boyish, almost childish, in its contours, yet oddly old in meaning, and his eyes were marvelous—clear and serene and unafraid, like a dear, good child's.

"Goin' to pass me?" he laughed out, aware of her pondering regard.

She laughed, too, and spoke out her thought:

"Your voice minds me of some one I can't tell. What's your name?"

"William Martin. What's yours?"

"Mary Starr."

"Mary—that's the best name of all."

"Why?"

"Why it's the name of the Mother of God."

She blushed shamefacedly, the Puritan in her stirring at the papist term.

He said to the blush gently, "It's Christmas Day."

Again the soft blur in the Yankee phrases that fingered at her memory.

"You clippin' 'cross lots to your Christmas dinner?" he asked her next.

"My Christmas dinner's here." She touched her bundle.

"Wish mine was!"

"Set down with me—I'd be pleased to have you." The precise country formula came quaintly in the broken house between the two vagrants. She spread out her clean napkin with the good homemade bread and ham, cheese



"We gave the kids a tree—candles an' candy an' cake an' nuts, stuff out of our boxes. It was a celebration, all right!"

and nut cakes. "I wish 'twas so I had somethin' hot for you."

"Those boiled eggs you got? I'll blaze up a fire on the hearth an' roast 'em. Roast eggs 're the grand feast."

The parson's dining room looked into the eye of the sun and was warm and sheltered; Blue Pool burned before them like a piece of heaven dropped on the snow; and the eternal hills circled them in their arms. They ate every crumb of the feast and washed it down with water from the pool.

"Gee! I'm happy!" laughed the boy, filling his pipe and casting his cape coat from him in his warmth.

"Oh!" cried Polly in startled pity. The boy's left sleeve was empty to the shoulder.

"What is it? Oh, my missing hook!" He smiled at her without bitterness.

"Was it an accident?"

"The war."

"The war?"

"The war," louder as if she might not have heard.

"Oh, that over in Europe," as if she spoke of another planet. "You ain't a Frenchman?"

"Wish I was! They're the men for you! An' women an' children, too! Ready at the fall of the hat an' game to the last drop of blood in 'em! No, woman dear, I'm U. S. A., State o' Maine, born an' raised."

"How you come to be in the war, then?" in sheer bewilderment.

He blew a cloud of smoke toward her and laughed.

"It was this way," and the story was off. "I was a kind o' bad boy," with the pride youth always takes in that statement, "an' the little old farm wasn't big enough. So I hooked up with a fellow that shipped cattle to England an' went as cow-puncher. That was the spring."

"What spring?"

"Why, 1914," as if there could be no other, "a year an' a half ago. When I got to England, I thought I'd look in on my granddad over in the Old Country."

"Where?"

"The West—Connaught."

"My mother was born in Connaught." To think that he should be thus linked to her! The world was shrinking to be grasped in her two hands.

"There's a good few beautiful women over in it like you." The boy flung out the compliment as he sped on, and Polly did not even mark it. "A chap there got me to ship for Holland, hand on a steamer. I was out to see the world, so another chap an' me voted to foot it through Holland an' Belgium down to Paris. Jim Handy he was, from the South. Rest his soul!" He touched his breast quickly three times. "So that's how we happened in Belgium when they came."

"Who came?"

Now he stared.

"The Huns."

Polly's dazed face showed no light. What did she know of it all?

"Girl alive, the Germans!"

"Oh, yes!" This was sure ground. "They acted harsh, didn't they, to the Belgians?"

The boy laid down his pipe, drew himself to his feet, and walked out on to the open snow. When he came back to his seat, he said gently:

"Would you want to hear it—what Jim an' me saw our own selves there? Would you really, now?"

"Tell me. I'm a nurse. I've seen folks sick an' dyin'."

"Dyin'!" His voice blasted her.

Then, in a low and steady voice, he told her his story. It is a story known now the world around, but it had not then climbed into this northern cranny. He told it with the magic of a nation of story-tellers, his young, gaunt face as fierce as a sword, and he told it to a heart deep-welled with pity, unslaked by repetitions of Russian pogroms, Armenian massacres, and Mexican barbarities, full of clear and fresh and undefiled compassion.

"Oh!" she cried as he ended, her face as white as his and drenched with tears.

"I wouldn't 'a' believed it o' men!"

"They ain't. At least those ones ain't. When we struck the English army in Northern France, we enlisted."

"To fight?"

"Sure!" The strain eased in a laugh.

"But you ain't Belgian nor French nor yet English," she wondered.

"Oh, girl dear, they're human bein's an' I'm a human bein'!" The great creed born in the blood and iron of the war from this boy's lips.

Her small crack of the world spoke stiffly in her:

"Those folks over there warn't any kin to you, didn't speak any language you'd ever heard, you didn't even know their names, an' you went into their army to *fight* for them?"

"Never even saw the faces they had to 'em," he laughed back.

"But you might have been killed!" She stressed the horror of it; killed for an alien folk in a far-off land, her voice made of it.

"Jim was. At Mons." Again he touched his breast. "He went out in my arms. He was glad right up to the end he'd—gone into it."

"How did he die?"

"A shell tore him open." His pipe would not draw, and he pressed more tobacco into it, then let it hang idle in his fingers.

"Was the fightin' awful?"

"Sometimes."

"You tell me."

Again he was the story-teller, and Polly, her face cupped in her two hands, his stricken listener. Now no more fleeing women and cowering children and foul deeds done in holes and corners formed his theme; he sang of arms and the man. And he himself was no more a sick boy with a marred body, nor Polly a poor girl once bound out to a farmer. He was Con of the Hundred Fights and she Maeve of the Silver Hills. Where his words, which were of the earth, faltered, her spirit, which was of the air, winged its way up the path.

He pulled himself in with a jerk.

"In August I got put out of it in a night attack, lay in hospital till November, an' then beat it for home on a tramp steamer."

She crashed down to earth.

"Your poor arm!"

"Forget it, miss," very gently, and he smiled to show her that he had. "I wanted to get into the game an' I paid the price an' it wasn't too big, no, sir!"

Polly's eyes burned deeply into his tired white face. If only she might burn the shrouding flesh away to the naked soul, to read from it the secret of this boy, who tossed his life into the

air with the tips of his fingers and laughed to see it fluttering high; this dreamer of dreams, world loser and world forsaker. Old words flowed back to her: "O death, where is thy sting?" The very King of Terrors knelt to this sick boy.

The boy spoke out unregardingly:

"I had money enough to come home in style, but I wanted to leave somethin' behind for the kids' Christmas over there—the little Frenchies, you know."

"Do they keep Christmas there?" Did people clenched in a death grapple think of what Bart called "shaller business?"

"I guess! Kids an' soldiers an' the whole push—trees an' boxes an' spreads an' doin's all round. I was hurt last Christmas—just jabbed in the ribs—but I was back of the lines in a village an' we gave the kids a tree—candles an' candy an' cake an' nuts, stuff out of our boxes, an' some little carts an' forts an' like that a fellow had jig-sawed out. An' somebody had dug up some dolls some place. It was a celebration, all right!"

Toys and dolls and trees in that welter of crime and agony!

"Christmas—a kind of religious day," she murmured vaguely.

"It's the birthday of Christ," said the boy simply.

"I never thought much about Him," in an humble voice. "Somehow I've—I've always been so busy."

"That's the way with me. Such a lot of things here to think about," he assured her in a friendly understanding, "your work an' your family an' your fun an' all that. But over there—well, there ain't much but sufferin' an' dyin'—dyin' horribly—an' Him. Men have to think about Him. An' He's there where it's hardest fightin'."

Polly was wanted to the set phrases into which, in old communities, the living body of religion has mummified, but this gentle simplicity made her trem-

ble queerly as if at things not to be uttered.

"I never saw Him myself," the boy went on, as if speaking of the commander of the army, "but other fellows have, an' mostly always those that died did."

"How do you know?" she whispered.

"I saw their dead faces."

The light had slipped away from the room, but it still gleamed, a sheen of gold, upon Blue Pool. Long shadows spread out under the pines. Night was drawing in.

Polly spoke in a tranced voice, following her thoughts along a little road:

"Did it seem worth doin'—just toys an' games an' candies for the children Christmas?"

"Oh, sure it did!" He sounded a hearty boy again. "If you'd seen the kids! They hadn't played for so long they'd kind of lost the trick of it, but not quite, bein' French. Our camp had the grand tree, too."

"An' you gave your money for this year again! Have you got any left?"

"Oh, say!" laughed the boy. "The stage driver'll give me a lift free an' some one'll help out on a meal. I'll be fine an' gay goin' home."

"I never gave any one a Christmas present in my whole life." The words dropped sadly from her.

"Oh, now, how about that good dinner?"

"I wish I could give the little kids Christmas presents!" she mourned.

"You can next year. The war'll be goin' on then, too, an' they'll need trees more'n ever."

"How can I? You goin' back to fight?"

He laughed.

"My fightin' days are over, but I'm goin' back all right, soon as I've seen the folks an' got somethin' to stick to my ribs."

"Will you take my presents to them?" She caught at it eagerly.

"Send to the Red Cross."

"What is it?"

He frowned at the dropping sun, then crushed into a couple of sentences the pith of the matter. Polly heard just one word and leaped at that.

"Do they want women to nurse?"

"They're prayin' for 'em!" He marked her tall, lithe body and strong, motherly hands. "You'd make a lovely nurse, sister." Then his clear eyes looked into the hidden places. "But it's the awful work, an' sometimes they die."

Polly's eyes were seeing visions beyond her telling. She awoke with a start when he took her hand for good-by.

"I got to leg it along now. Which way's to the stagecoach to those corners?"

She pointed uphill.

"The road winds past Seven Days' Work—a great, awful crag of rock—an' through Bozrah Plains. Then, at the place where four roads cross, you take the stage."

"Thank you for a mighty good dinner, Mary Starr"—he gripped her hand—"an' Merry Christmas to you!"

"Wait! Wait!" Polly fumbled in her bosom. "Please! It's a Christmas present!" She pulled out a tight little wad of money, separated it in half, and crowded one section into his hand. "It's the very first Christmas present I ever gave. Take it! Ah, please!"

The boy smiled at her with those clear eyes that were so young and so wise.

"Thank you! It'll get me home a-leapin' for Christmas night. Look here! I want to give you a Christmas present, too, because—" His laugh was tender. "Pull it off. I made it myself out of a piece of shell."

He stretched out his hand, on one of the fingers of which shone a ring. Polly drew off the band and slipped it onto her own finger.

"You wear it an' say, 'Merry Christmas for the French kids.'" He stepped nearer, laughed, and kissed her lightly up close to her dark hair.

Polly stood where he had been, her eyes on the worn old floor, till the sound of his feet on the snow had died away. The room and the world seemed strangely shadowy and silent. She gathered her coat tight about her and started on her way toward the other stage, the one to the junction.

Her wandering feet were set now upon a straight path, her flying fancies knotted into a strong purpose. It was as if all that had shifted and floated in her were bound firmly into that circle, forged in fire, tempered in blood. She was going to France as a nurse.

Her life had no significance here since she had broken with Bart. Just to work to keep bread in her own mouth was a poor fashion of action beyond her power to will, but to give her youth and strength to bind up wounded boys, to comfort stricken age, to nurse babies—ah, there was "a task for all she had of fortitude and delicacy."

She must get a place to nurse in order to pay her debt before she could start, for the old parson's blood spoke in her, and that would take months.

"There'll be sick folks to the city, a big place like that," she thought.

"I never gave Bart a Christmas present in all my life." A queer pain twisted her face. The first Christmas present of her life she had given to a strange lad, and she would never give Bart anything now! The boy's innocent kiss burned on her temple.

"I can run back up to his house an' write on a piece of paper 'Merry Christmas,'" she comforted herself. Then the irony of it checked her. "I can't leave him without one Christmas present."

Not one present! And soon between them would roll "the salt, estranging

sea." She thought upon some of the soldier's stories.

"I can write, 'God bless you, Bart!'"

Like a swallow, she skimmed back up the path through the woods, turned at the lower pasture, and found the road to Bart's farm half a mile below her own.

The late afternoon had spent the glory of morning; the keen glitter was gone from sky and earth; a soft pearliness veiled the whole; more snow boded.

A bend in the road brought out against the sky the Medberry farm, with its big, prosperous house. Bart himself was just driving in with Pepper and Salt, the work horses, and on the wood drag beside him sat the soldier boy.

Polly took cover behind a tree and watched. In a few minutes out jangled Skipper and Mate, the best team in the county, Bart's hired boy driving, Aunt Jennie Blue, his housekeeper, and the soldier on the back seat. Bart did not appear.

"My soul!" murmured the girl, and stood agaze as the sleigh flashed down toward the corners.

"I guess I see how 'twas," she told herself. "Bart met him when he was a-drivin' home from Seven Days"—quit lumberin' early likely—an' got into conversation with him an' told him he'd send him over to the corners for his train if he'd come 'long to get the colts. That'd be Bart's way."

She swallowed over the words. Bart's way was so often kind.

She waited for him to cross the back yard on the rabbit's road to her house. The dark sifted down from the sky like birds' wings fluttering. The moon swam up Book Hill and shone through a silver veil with a soft magic upon a world enchanted into wondrous beauty. Great stars beamed like eyes that blessed.

Polly shivered a little. Could she

have lost Bart? She would run quick and be away. She crept on soundless feet to his kitchen door and knelt beneath the lilac bushes at the uncurtained window.

Bart was inside, his lamp lighted, his supper set out on the table, his dogs stretched by the bright stove. But he was not mending harness nor reading the *Farmers' Friend*. He sat at the side table beneath the lamp, a scrap of paper in one hanging hand, his head dropped flat on his arm.

She looked away across the silvered meadows. She saw the hosts surge past in furious combat; she saw the dying raising anguished eyes toward the sky, and the stark dead with "the



The room blurred before Polly's eyes. Just once she had seen him thus—the night his mother had lain dead in the foreroom chamber.

The room blurred before Polly's eyes. Just once she had seen him thus—the night his mother had lain dead in the foreroom chamber. She remembered that she had slipped her childish hand into his and that he had held it against his cheek.

great vision of the face of Christ" on their still faces. She saw mangled men in coats, little children in refuges. All that the boy had told her passed before her eyes like the panorama of life before the drowning. She saw the boy himself giving all for a dream.

She turned back to the one man she knew, alone, broken. She was leaving him forever on Christmas Day!

And suddenly how poor and foolish a thing appeared her grip upon the old place and the parson's heirship—her tiny corner, her trickle of blood—when whole nations were at stake and rivers of blood flowing. Since morning the web of life was woven in too terrible, too glorious, a pattern to snarl it with trivial threads. Her pride to Bart for a Christmas gift! He wouldn't understand—dear, numb Bart!—but she would know and it would be her sweet secret. She stood erect and whistled.

He was out on the snow, looking anxiously about, for that was their own particular hail.

"Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!" she cried valiantly. Then, with a step beside him, "You sell the parson place to Let. I give it to you, dear, for a Christmas present."

He looked at her in a way that had no meaning.

"Where you been all day?"

"Keepin' Christmas." For a moment she wanted to cry out that she had not come to be forgiven and taken back; then suddenly all that was like the vapor over the moon, a cloud that was swept away by the glory. "It's a Christmas present, the first I ever gave you." Then, to fill the silence: "Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!" but pitifully now.

"Polly"—his voice was husky—"I met a fellow by Seven Days' Work had fought in the war an' got near killed. I brought him over here an' sent him on to the corners with the colts."

She fixed her eyes intently upon him. In his serious face some emotion, foreign alike to resentment and to forgiveness, strove to speak.

"He's been fightin' for those folks

over there, though he comes from the State o' Maine."

"Yes," she breathed,

"Strangers to him they are, an' nothin' at all to be gained by it for him. He's all lamed up for life," her own wonder in his voice; then, in a rush of passion, "I tell you, Polly, he made me think cheap o' myself, him just a boy an' me a growed man never so much as give a cent to help out those poor folks over there that are human bein's the same as you an' me."

"I want them to have my house," she cried.

"An' I tell you"—he had not listened—"splittin' hairs over this an' that, my way or yours, ain't a man's business when women, an' children are bein' stabbed an' burned! This ain't a time in the world's history for you an' me, tokened man an' wife, to break up over a poor ol' house. You keep the old place, dear."

"No! No!" she cried, and her arms reached up to him. "It's my Christmas present to you, the first I ever gave."

The moonlight showed all the things in his face that made this wild creature love him.

"I never gave you a Christmas present either, but I'm a-goin' to next year."

"Listen!" Her wit leaped to the light. "We'll sell the place an' send the money—all o' it—to those poor people. It'll be our Christmas present to each other."

He caught her close in his arms, as if something made him fear she might glide away upon a moonbeam, and kissed her soft, dark hair where the boy's lips had touched her.

"You're too good for any man, darlin'!"

And she whispered against his coat, sobbingly:

"Oh, it's a Merry Christmas, after all!"

MY SANTAS

(A Whimsey)

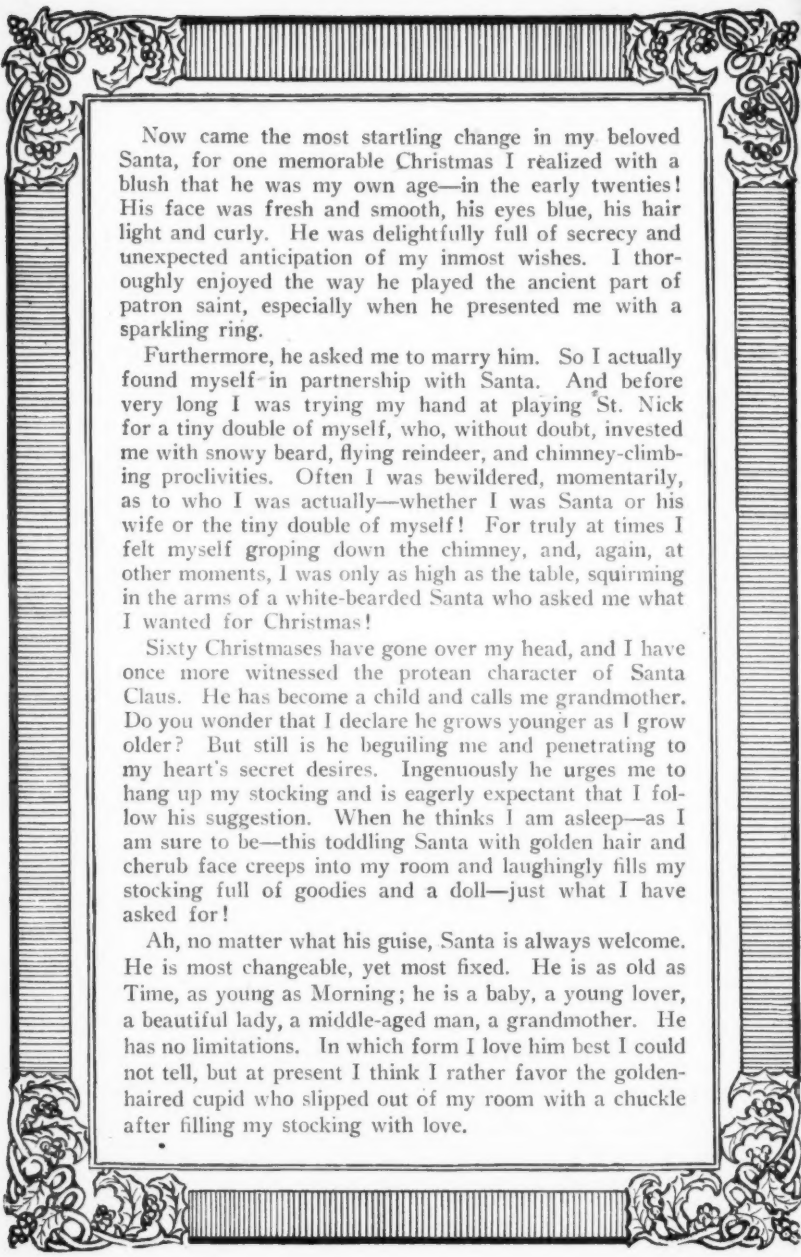
By Wisty Wheeler

AS I grow older, Santa Claus grows younger. I remember him first when I was no taller than the table, while he was as high as the Christmas tree. And he seemed as old as Father Time. Indeed, I fear I confused these two great personages in my mind, thinking that Father Time was, somehow, Santa in his summer garb, minus his furs and carrying a scythe to cut the grass.

Once I recall, when I was about four years old, that Santa took me up in his arms and asked me what I wanted for Christmas, but I was too frightened to tell him.

It was when I was about ten years old that dear old Santa metamorphosed himself from a hoary saint of snow and wonder into the most beautiful woman I ever knew. Under ordinary circumstances, she might have been taken for my mother. Of course, this transformation was a shock to my romantic heart, but I experienced a thrill of realism that somewhat compensated me for my loss of the mysterious chimney gentleman. My lady Santa differed enormously from my erstwhile frosty friend. Just before Christmas, she developed her leading characteristics, which comprised an extraordinary censorship over my actions. I was commanded to keep out of closets and to stop poking under the beds. And to my chagrin I would discover that many bureau drawers were locked which were open during the rest of the year. My lady Santa also sat up late nights, engaged upon secret tasks involving much use of the sewing machine.

From my tenth year on, Santa alternated his rôle of beautiful and busy lady with that of a middle-aged gentleman whose mustache drooped and whose eyebrows bristled. Oddly enough, he looked like a twin brother to my father. In this rôle of middle-aged gentleman, Santa disregarded all his familiar mystery and love of secretive working and boldly made out checks for the gifts I had set my heart upon.



Now came the most startling change in my beloved Santa, for one memorable Christmas I realized with a blush that he was my own age—in the early twenties! His face was fresh and smooth, his eyes blue, his hair light and curly. He was delightfully full of secrecy and unexpected anticipation of my inmost wishes. I thoroughly enjoyed the way he played the ancient part of patron saint, especially when he presented me with a sparkling ring.

Furthermore, he asked me to marry him. So I actually found myself in partnership with Santa. And before very long I was trying my hand at playing 'St. Nick for a tiny double of myself, who, without doubt, invested me with snowy beard, flying reindeer, and chimney-climbing proclivities. Often I was bewildered, momentarily, as to who I was actually—whether I was Santa or his wife or the tiny double of myself! For truly at times I felt myself groping down the chimney, and, again, at other moments, I was only as high as the table, squirming in the arms of a white-bearded Santa who asked me what I wanted for Christmas!

Sixty Christmases have gone over my head, and I have once more witnessed the protean character of Santa Claus. He has become a child and calls me grandmother. Do you wonder that I declare he grows younger as I grow older? But still is he beguiling me and penetrating to my heart's secret desires. Ingenuously he urges me to hang up my stocking and is eagerly expectant that I follow his suggestion. When he thinks I am asleep—as I am sure to be—this toddling Santa with golden hair and cherub face creeps into my room and laughingly fills my stocking full of goodies and a doll—just what I have asked for!

Ah, no matter what his guise, Santa is always welcome. He is most changeable, yet most fixed. He is as old as Time, as young as Morning; he is a baby, a young lover, a beautiful lady, a middle-aged man, a grandmother. He has no limitations. In which form I love him best I could not tell, but at present I think I rather favor the golden-haired cupid who slipped out of my room with a chuckle after filling my stocking with love.

Shop Early

By Harriet Lummis Smith

ILLUSTRATED BY R. L. LAMBDIN

The wisdom of Minerva applied to making an unexpectedly happy Christmas for Aunt Betty.

It was Christmas weather, so the hurrying shoppers said, tossing the comment over their shoulders as they passed—blowy, snowy weather with a snap to the wind like the crackling of icicles. There was frost on the windowpanes of the warm room where two children sat tying up Christmas parcels. Occasionally Minerva's eyes wandered from her work to the magical tracery upon the glass. It looked to her like Christmas trees.

Minerva's industry was vicarious. They were Winifred's gifts she was attiring in holiday dress. Her air of absorption suggested a conscience at ease and accounted for Winifred's remark:

"I s'pose your presents are all ready."

Minerva lifted candid eyes.

"All 'cept one or two," she said.

No one would have guessed from her inscrutable countenance that she expected to give just two presents—one to Aunt Betty, the other to the very Winifred who questioned her so nonchalantly.

"I guess you're one of the shop-earlies," suggested Winifred, applying a Santa Claus seal to the tip of her tongue. "Mamma and Sophie try to be, but they say that just when they think they're all done, some silly old person sends them something they don't want a bit, and they have to rush downtown at the last minute and buy something else."

The ringing of the doorbell, at this season imbued with special signifi-

cance, rendered a reply unnecessary. Winifred rushed into the hall, hung over the banisters for a protracted period, and returned complacent.

"Candy," she announced. "A five-pound box. Sophie certainly is lucky. She sends 'em just fotygrafts, and they send her candy and flowers and such lovely silk stockings! Only grandma doesn't approve of the silk stockings, but Sophie says she's old-fashioned."

Minerva ignored that little point.

"Who sends 'em?"

"Oh, different young men. Sophie's very popular. She couldn't tell which one 'twas if they didn't put their cards in."

"Cards?" Minerva had a vision of the ace of hearts.

"Calling cards, silly." Winifred's manner grew patronizing as she perceived her friend's need of enlightenment. "Grown-up folks use 'em instead of Christmas tags."

"What kind of fotygrafts does she send?"

"Oh, pictures of herself. They don't mind what kind."

"Do you—do you think Sophie is so very pretty, Winifred?" queried Minerva, with the tact characteristic of her tender years.

"Well, she's pretty pretty when she's fixed up. I guess if they could see her now, with her hair done up to make it ripple, they wouldn't send her much."

"Aunt Betty doesn't have to put up her hair," Minerva boasted. "It curls like anything, all by itself." She stood

up, brushing to the carpet the bits of tinsel cord and scraps of ribbon littering her short skirts. "I guess it's 'most dark enough for Aunt Betty to be coming now. I'd better be going."



Minerva walked two miles to the main post office, spent the few pennies remaining after her expenditure on postage, and came home weary.

"There's the doorbell!" exclaimed Winifred, momentarily forgetful of the convention that requires protests when a guest expresses the intention of leaving. She was again hanging over the banisters as Minerva trotted past, murmuring abstractedly, "Another box

of candy! And it's only the day before the day before Christmas!"

The cold outside was keen. Minerva's teeth chattered as her black-stockinged legs twinkled through the dusk like their own shadows. But her heart was warm. In a child's unthinking fashion, she had resented the fact that her pretty young aunt was missing her birthright of girlish pleasure. Thanks to Winifred's communicative mood, she had learned the remedy.

"Fotygrafts," said Minerva to herself, repeating the word almost with awe, as if it had been a charm.

Minerva and Aunt Betty occupied

what their landlady was pleased to call a "flat," consisting of two rooms and a closet on the third floor, where the heat straggled up reluctantly and the odors of cooking belowstairs mounted as if on wings. The closet was their kitchen, and on a tiny gas stove Aunt Betty per-

formed culinary miracles. The front room was dining room and living room, and also served for the reception of their few guests, of whom Warren Ames was the most frequent. Aunt Betty had said that, under the circumstances, once in six weeks was often enough for him to call, but Warren thought that, under the circumstances, he could not possibly stay away longer than a month.

They were thinking of different circumstances, it will be noticed. She had in mind the fact that Warren was the sole support of a widowed mother and three able-bodied sisters, who would rather have stopped their living altogether than have tried to earn it. And as Betty herself had Minerva to rear, she was quite right in saying that once in six weeks was often enough for them to see each other. But since, from Warren's standpoint, she was the one woman, dear and desirable, he was certainly excusable for thinking that four weeks was as long as he could go without a glimpse of her. In this criss-cross world, this clashing of imperatives is inevitable.

As Betty and Minerva sat down to their frugal meal, the consciousness of a revolutionary bit of knowledge imparted a peculiar radiance to Minerva's smile.

Of course she could not long keep the secret to herself.

"Aunt Betty," she began jubilantly, "I know how you can get lots of Christmas presents."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Aunt Betty, buttering her bakery roll. "How interesting! Tell me about it."

"Fotygrafts," said Minerva impressively. "That's how."

Aunt Betty's blank expression showed the need of elucidation. Minerva enlarged upon her theme.

"Fotygrafts. You send 'em to people—to young men, Winifred says—and they send you lovely things."

Betty shook her head.

"It wouldn't work with me, honey. If I were a movie star, it would be different."

"But you're prettier than Sophie Tamadge," insisted Minerva, distressed by the threatened collapse of her air castle.

"H'm! That's a matter of opinion." But Betty's tone betrayed complacency.

"I 'most know Warren Ames thinks so, and Mr. Sedgewick."

Aunt Betty stared, then laughed helplessly. The mention of Warren was not a surprise. Warren's condition was such that a wayfaring man, though a fool, could not possibly be mistaken as to the state of his affections. But the notion of Mr. Sedgewick in the light of an admirer—her exemplary elderly employer who apparently failed to differentiate between his stenographer and other necessary office furniture—appealed to her sense of humor.

Minerva misunderstood her laugh.

"Honest I think so, Aunt Betty. When Mr. Ames comes here, he sits and looks at you this way."

The impersonation of an enamored young man, feasting his eyes upon the object of his adoration, was startlingly correct. But by now Betty was alive to her responsibilities as a mentor of youth.

"That will do, Minerva. Did I tell you that there was a poor old woman in the car to-night who had lost her pocketbook, with all her Christmas money? Everybody was so sorry for her."

After Minerva was safely in bed, and work could begin on the rose-colored scarf destined to prominence among the contents of Minerva's stocking, Betty smiled again, but bitterly, over her niece's quaint formula for changing their Christmas penury to plenty. She could interpret the child's feeling by her own. The contrast between the dazzling shop windows and the lean

little stocking Minerva would find on Christmas morning had hurt her for days, like an aching tooth.

It was a pity Warren and she had ever met, she told herself. There were other men she might have married—not Mr. Sedgewick, of course; that was only Minerva's absurdity—but men who did not have three ladylike sisters in addition to a ladylike mother, all of whom believed profoundly that a woman's sphere is the home.

"And now Warren has spoiled every other man for me, and I've spoiled every other woman for him," cried Betty, with tears of exasperation. "And we can't ever be anything more to each other."

Her sense of injury had temporarily blinded her to the fact that love itself is worth more than any joy it can bring. And then, saving herself from a fit of crying by the recollection of the work that remained to be done before Christmas morning, Betty wiped a tear from the pink wool and went on knitting.

She sat up late working on the pink scarf, and then overslept by half an hour, so that breakfast was an even more hurried meal than usual.

"What are you going to do with yourself this long holiday?" Betty asked Minerva, with the inevitable pang of one who leaves a loved child to loneliness.

"Oh, lots of things. I've got to finish getting ready for Christmas to-day, you know."

A little cheered by Minerva's matter-of-fact tone, Betty kissed her and departed. And scarcely had the door closed behind her when Minerva began a systematic rummaging. Minerva had reached a resolution overnight. Since Aunt Betty would not look out for her own interests, some one else must do it for her.

The results of a thorough search of the little apartment were not wholly

satisfactory. Minerva had discovered just two of the necessary "fotygrafts." One was a picture of Aunt Betty at sixteen—a rather pert Aunt Betty, if the truth be told, with a pompadour of unfashionable altitude. Underneath she had written in an unformed hand, that was somehow oddly like her present chirography, "Yours for keeps, Betty." To what youthful adorer that faded photograph had been presented, only to be recalled, Minerva of course did not know, and even Betty could hardly have told, for to busy, burdened twenty-six, the play love affairs of boyhood and girlhood are the vaguest of half-remembered dreams.

Minerva's other find was still less satisfactory. It was a picture of her great-grandmother's home, the house where Aunt Betty had been born. On the doorstep were two whitish blurs, one of which was Aunt Betty and the other a collie dog, and by looking closely one could distinguish the dog. Yet even in regard to this, Minerva was hopeful. For was it not a "fotygraft" and did not "fotygrafts" possess a strange magic as Christmas drew near?

The information Minerva had gleaned from Winifred stood her in good stead. She found Aunt Betty's calling cards—Aunt Betty had little use for calling cards nowadays—and assigned one to each picture. She always kept a supply of tissue paper for attiring her family of paper dolls. The lack of red ribbon troubled her, till happily she hit upon the expedient of cutting up a hair ribbon into narrow strips. After deliberation, she addressed the photograph of the old Allen place to Mr. Sedgewick. The ten-year-old likeness of Aunt Betty was directed to Mr. Warren Ames. Her other preparations completed, the indefatigable child walked two miles to the main post office, spent the few pennies remaining after her Christmas expenditure on postage, and came home weary, but

sustained by the consciousness that she had done her part toward making Aunt Betty's Christmas memorable.

Warren Ames was in his office rather late for the day before Christmas. That morning he had sent Betty the book of poems to which her stern sense of propriety restricted him. He felt no especial interests in his own gifts, concerning which his three sisters dropped smiling hints and for which he would receive the bill the first of January. He was inclined to think Christmas an overestimated season. And then, as he was dejectedly reflecting that it was time to go home, a weary postman made his appearance, and handed him, along with the usual office mail, a small package clumsily wrapped in brown paper.

A man in love is seldom logical. If he were, the novelists would go out of business. There were a score of things to make Warren suspicious regarding this inclosure, but he saw none of them—only Betty's face smiling up at him and the inscription beneath, which to his dazzled senses proclaimed surrender. He sat for a long, ineffable moment glutting his greedy eyes on those delicious words, "Yours for keeps." Then he came to his feet like a jack-in-the-box.

Half past five already! Heavens and earth! How late did the jewelers keep open the day before Christmas? He leaped for his hat and overcoat and ran with the latter on his arm. Betty's photograph in his breast pocket kept him warm enough.

The most modest of diamonds is a



He slipped the ring into place and kissed the hand that wore it as if it belonged to him.

somewhat ambitious investment for a young man with his father's family to support, but Warren was in that cheerful delirium when prudence has as little influence on conduct as differential calculus. The jeweler was an acquaintance who entered sympathetically into his task of selection and seemed nobly indifferent as to his pay. Warren departed, still irresponsible, purchased violets at the first florist's, and hailed a taxicab, the holiday street-car service failing to measure up to his exacting requirements.

Betty was alone when he arrived.

Minerva had been invited to some Christmas Eve festivities at Winifred's, and Betty was only too glad to have assistance in supplementing the child's meager Christmas. The pink scarf stuffed into Minerva's stocking made disgustingly little impression. It would be necessary to fall back on apples and oranges to give the stocking the knobby, well-rounded appearance that propriety demanded. Betty's tears were near falling as she thought of that Christmas stocking.

Warren's tempestuous entrance gave her no chance to say what was suitable under the peculiar circumstances. He simply took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Oh, Betty!" he said. "Oh, Betty, at last!"

He stood with his arms about her, his face hidden in her hair, and the worst of it was that her heart took sides with him against her common sense. For if there is a time of the year when a head feels the need of a shoulder to snuggle against, and a hand gropes for another hand to clasp, it is on Christmas Eve.

She came to herself when he took the ring from his pocket.

"Oh, Warren, you haven't! You must be crazy!"

But he was not the Warren she was wont to browbeat. He swept her objections aside with a dominating, masculine arrogance she found bewildering. All that interested him was to know whether the ring fitted or not. And as a matter of fact, it fitted as if it had been made for the slender finger of that left hand. He slipped it into place and kissed the hand that wore it as if it belonged to him.

"Oh, Warren!" Her voice broke as she protested. "It's so foolish when we can't ever— That ring doesn't mean anything."

"All we need is patience, Betty. Lots of men are making piles of money nowadays. And, besides, there's a fellow

calling on Edith every week or so, a nice, steady chap."

Betty stifled a laugh. There had been so many young men who had raised Warren's hopes by calling on his sisters and then gone away and become engaged to other girls. She had no more faith in Edith's admirer than in any of the others. Yet, though the little ring seemed destined to shine unmated on her finger, she found herself unable to wish it off again. Perhaps half a loaf was better than no bread. Perhaps it was better to claim the right to love each other, if they could never do more. On Christmas Eve it was easy to believe it.

They drew apart as Minerva came up the stairs. In a lowered voice, Warren suggested returning after dinner. Betty negated the suggestion. She wanted a little time to think.

"But you may come to-morrow," she relented.

"Of course I'm coming to-morrow! What do you take me for?"

His good-by kiss was hurried, for Minerva was nearing the top of the stairs. Warren greeted her with the exuberant fondness of a prospective relative and made his escape. Minerva looked at her aunt wide-eyed.

"Did—did—he give you anything, Aunt Betty?"

After all, an engagement without congratulations is like a salad without dressing. Betty extended her hand, and Minerva shrieked ecstatically.

"Oh, Aunt Betty. Oh! Oh!"

The silencing of Winifred's boasts were now only a question of time. For what were candy and silk stockings in comparison with this gleaming circlet? And her little outburst over, Minerva heaved a sigh of acute self-congratulation. She had no doubts now as to the wisdom of her course.

Minerva was ready to go to bed early, to hasten the advent of Christmas, and hardly was she asleep when



He could not tell whether she was dazed by the munificence of the sum or disappointed at its smallness.

the bell rang. Frowning and smiling together, Betty pushed the button and went into the hall to meet Warren. But it was Mr. Sedgewick who came up the stairs.

Betty's employer seemed strangely agitated.

"I received the photograph you sent me at a late hour this afternoon," was his beginning. "Under the circumstances, I can hardly regard it as an ordinary holiday remembrance. May I ask why you sent it?"

"A photograph! A photograph I sent you!"

"Why," insisted Mr. Sedgewick, like a man who meant to have his answer, "should you have sent me a picture of the old Allen place?"

"My grandfather's old home? You say I sent it to you?"

They seemed to be making little headway, each merely repeating the other's last remark. It was now Mr. Sedgewick's turn in this inconclusive dialogue.

"Your grandfather's home? But you are Miss Dwight."

It was a relief to come up against something that could be explained. Betty lost no time.

"No, I'm really Betty Allen. My father died when I was two years old and my mother's second husband was a minister. We were continually moving about, and it was so tiresome to be always explaining that we children came to be called by his name. But I have no legal right to it."

"You are Randolph Allen's daughter?"

"Yes. Oh, Mr. Sedgewick, did you know my father?"

He walked to the window and stood staring blankly at the circle of frosty sky framed by Betty's Christmas wreath. When he turned, his face was troubled.

"I blame myself," he began with difficulty, "more than I can say. I'm afraid I am going to forfeit your respect by what I have to tell you."

She spoke impulsively.

"You couldn't possibly do that."

"I'm not so sure. Yes, I knew your father. We worked together in the piano factory when we were hardly more than boys. Randolph was an ingenious fellow. One night he took me home with him, to the very house whose picture you sent me, and showed me a contrivance of his own for simplifying the process of our manufacture. It looked feasible to me. We did a lot of joking, as young fellows will. I was to patent the invention and get it on the market, and we would divide the profits. I did finally take the model to show it to a friend somewhat experienced in such things. He was not encouraging, but I kept the model. We both had an idea that I could do something with it later. And when I went to another State, I took it along."

His incomprehensible distress had communicated itself to Betty. As she

sat listening, her heart beat violently and she heard him with a strange, shrinking apprehension.

"I heard of your father's marriage and some years later of his death. It was about that time that I began to prosper. But it was at least ten years after your father died that one day I came across the old model. And as I looked it over, it seemed to me that the idea was sound and capable of an even wider application than I had believed. I tried it again, this time with very different results. A penniless inventor trying to interest a capitalist in an idea is on quite a different footing from a well-to-do business man. Those whom I consulted encouraged me. The invention was patented and put on the market. I could push it, and it did well from the first."

Betty was beginning to understand. Slowly her fresh color ebbed.

"I didn't forget about your father. I sent some one down to his old home to see if his widow were living there. Strangers were in possession. My messenger was told that your mother had married again and was no longer living. No mention was made of any children. It seems incredible now that I should have been satisfied with that, and yet, as God is my judge, I had no thought of wronging a human being."

"Do you mean," a weak voice asked him, "that there is money that belongs to Minerva and me?"

"Yes."

"A great deal?"

"Oh, no." He made haste to correct that false impression. "Possibly thirty or forty thousand——"

"Wait!" Betty clapped her hands over her ears. Her stiff lips framed the words with difficulty. "Wait! I'm not ready to hear it yet."

Her white face suggested fainting, and he stood up with a confused notion of rendering assistance, then subsided into his chair as she spoke again.

"Go on."

"I judge your share will be between thirty and forty thousand dollars. I need not tell you that I shall stand by the terms of my verbal agreement with your father."

He could not tell whether she was dazed by the munificence of the sum or disappointed at its smallness. She sat without moving, one small hand gripping its fellow. After an uncomfortable silence, he found himself on his feet.

"I shall bring matters to a settlement as soon as possible. I hope, when you have had time to think things all over, you will not feel unkindly toward me."

She roused at that.

"I don't feel unkindly now. I never shall."

"Then good night—and a Merry Christmas."

Good night."

He had taken two steps to the door when Betty leaped to her feet.

"Oh, Mr. Sedgewick, if all that money is mine, couldn't you lend me just ten dollars?"

"My child!" His voice was near breaking. "Forgive my thoughtlessness!"

"It's Minerva's stocking," explained Betty, the tears running down her cheeks. "It's such a measly stocking, filled up with things like apples and nuts and make-believes. Oh, I've hated to have the day come on account of that poor, slim little stocking!"

He dragged a roll of bills from his pocket and held them toward her without an attempt to count them. She peeled the topmost from the roll, and pushed away his hand.

"That's enough. If I had a thousand to-night, I'd spend it all. Tomorrow I'll be sane again, unless I wake up and find I've dreamed all this. Good night."

Betty had her things on before he was out of the house. She raced down the stairs behind him and stopped, rather breathless, to use Mrs. Mann's telephone. Mrs. Mann accepted her nickel and retired to the hall to listen.

"Hello! Hello! Is this you, Warren? Tell me, are any of the stores open to-night?"

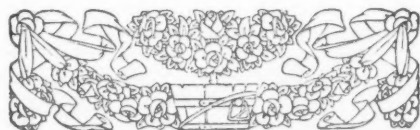
"Stores?" Warren's voice showed his astonishment. "Why, none of the good ones. I believe that places like Goldstein's and Dodge & Brooks are open till ten o'clock. But you couldn't get anything you wanted there."

"Yes, I can. Dolls and tea sets and games. Jump on the car, Warren, and meet me at the entrance of Dodge & Brooks. And, oh, Warren, we won't have to wait after all!"

"If we wait, we won't get in. It's after nine now. A pretty time for humane people to be doing their Christmas shopping!"

Betty's answering laugh startled him.

"I'll explain later. But, oh, dearest"—she had quite forgotten the attentive Mrs. Mann—"it's going to be such a wonderful New Year!"



The Middler

By Mariel Brady

Author of "The Taming of the Shrew"

ILLUSTRATED BY LAURA E. FOSTER

A very real story of real human beings. Could you measure up to this splendid "middle" sister and the sacrifice she made?

AT six, the battered old alarm clock lifted its strident voice, and Julia, with a quick glance at the still-sleeping Norma, slipped out of bed and throttled its raucous tones with a deft twist that spoke of long experience.

It was slightly chilly in the room, and she hurried with her dressing, screwing her heavy, dull-brown hair into an unattractive knot high on her head and shrugging her really fine shoulders into a house dress of unbecoming gray percale. She knew it was hideous, but gray doesn't show dirt so quickly as other hues.

When she was ready to go downstairs, she gave one grave, comprehensive glance into the mirror. The glass was bordered with a frieze of Norma's dance programs, and Julia looked from them to the sleeping girl in the bed. A sharp dagger thrust of pain contracted the elder sister's heart as her eyes rested on Norma's unconscious face.

Norma was just twenty. A childlike flush tinted her pure cheeks; her red lips were softly parted; her long lashes had faint blue shadows under their curled edges. One rounded arm was flung over her bright head, and the lace of her night robe had slipped from one white, virginal shoulder. She was angelic or nearly so.

Julia sighed as she closed the door quietly behind her. She was thirty and fast slipping into a drab and unattrac-

tive middle age. She sighed again as she raised the kitchen shade and let a flood of sunlight pour mercilessly in upon her; then she went deftly to work.

When the table was neatly set, the coffee steaming at one side of the stove, the eggs draining in their wire basket, and the toast arranged in the rack, she took a blue pitcher of hot water and mounted the steep stairs again to her invalid mother's room.

"Morning, mumsie," she said cheerfully, pouring the water into a bowl and catching up a fresh towel from the rack. "I know you slept well. You look so bright this lovely morning."

"I heard the clock strike every single hour!" came the querulous denial from the bed. "You know very well, Julia, that I never sleep soundly. I called twice, but I could be murdered in my bed and you girls would never hear me."

"I'm sorry, mother. Never mind; you shall have a long, long nap this morning," soothed her daughter, touching with gentle fingers the petulant face on the pillow. "There! Now you're as fresh as a rose. Just put your fine-lady fingers into the bowl now and see how good the water feels."

"I hate water!" moaned her mother, shivering. "I don't see why I have to be disturbed at this unearthly hour, anyway. The girls aren't up."

"I'm going to call Norma right away, mumsie, and I can hear Elinor moving

about already. You know you like to be freshened up when they run in to say good-by."

"Say good-by! Yes, that's all I'm good for to my daughters! Off they rush to their pleasures and forget their poor old mother lying helpless and neglected in her bed year after year. Norma out to her foolish dancing night after night; Elinor buried in her musty books! I might as well have no daughters. Well, I won't be here to plague them forever. Some day they'll be sorry——"

"Good morning, mother," broke in Elinor's crisp, even voice from the doorway. "You look very well to-day. Jule, could you hurry breakfast a bit? I want to make the early train."

Julia hastily put a new magazine within reach of her mother's hand, knocked at Norma's door, and ran down the stairs.

When the two sisters were seated at the table, Elinor looked up suddenly from her egg and said something she had had in mind for some painful months. She was thirty-two, a teacher of English in a high school, and more than ordinarily studious and ambitious.

"Jule," she said nervously, "I've got to get away from here. Mother—this dull, dismal house—— Well, you know. My nerves are jangling horribly. I can't endure it any longer, Jule. I'm stultifying. I'm hideously lonely. I can't ask my kind of people here, Jule, and so it's come to this—I've simply got to go. Oh, I know I'm abominably selfish, Jule! I've agonized over it more than you'll credit me for, but I think I shall go to live at Chapter House. A good many of the faculty live there. It's very reasonable, Jule, and I'll help out here at home just as always—perhaps more. There's no use looking at me that way, Jule. I've got to go."

Julia had put down the coffeepot as if it burned her. She looked dully at

her sister's tired white face with its delicately arched brows and its sweet, sensitive mouth.

"I'm sure of that, Elinor." Her voice was curiously low. "I've—I've seen this coming for a long while. I used to feel as you do myself, but it was a long while ago. I'm—used—to things now."

"Poor old Jule!"

Elinor's tone was compassionate, but relieved. Her news had been taken better than she had dreamed.

"Poor old Jule! What a pity you were born the middler! The brunt of everything falls on you. Don't say anything to mother, will you, until I'm out of the house? She'll only—fret."

After she had gone, Julia sat absently crumbling bread beside her plate until Norma ran in.

The girl had on her hat and coat, cheap, flashy garments of to-morrow's fashion, but made oddly and sweetly becoming by the radiant youth of their wearer.

"Oh, Jule," she crooned coaxingly as her sister slipped hot toast to her plate, "could you get along without my five this week? There's the duckiest frock in Taylor's—black tulle over silver with bead embroidery. I'm just crazy about it, Jule—and I do need it for the prom. You know I've nothing but old rags, and Ted Lansing's asked me to go. If I pay down the five, I can get it. You can manage some way, can't you, Jule?"

Her sister pushed back a straying lock of her heavy hair. Her eyes were suddenly anxious.

"It's the second time this month," she answered slowly, "and mother's port and fresh eggs and fruit cost a good deal extra. And, Norma, Elinor's leaving us. She's going to live at Chapter House with the other teachers."

Norma pushed her chair back violently. For a moment her blanched young face looked blankly into her sis-

ter's; then a red flame of anger scorched the soft youth from her eyes and lips, leaving it seared and cruel.

"Leave us! The miserable, selfish snob! Yes, that's just what she is! She's ashamed of us all because of her stuck-up, high-brow college friends! Leaving us! And you make weepy eyes at me just because I want a cheap little evening gown! How else am I to endure my life if I can't dance? Don't I slave over a typewriter from eight until six every day? This house is like a tomb! None of my friends will come here, even if mother could stand their racket. And I'm young, and what else is there to do but go out and dance? I tell you this, Julia Carberry: I shall marry the very first man, old or young—good or bad—rich or poor—bald or albino—that I can inveigle into asking me! I will not endure life in this house any longer! So there!"

She rushed out. The door slammed violently behind her. After a moment the street door banged furiously also.

Julia sat very still, her eyes on the unattractive huddle of soiled dishes on the table. A sort of sick terror held her, a dread of impending change in the dull round of her days. Elinor going and Norma, pretty, babyish Norma, contemplating an immediate and loveless marriage! It was unthinkable and yet it was to be.

She tried to cast back her tired mind over the twelve long years of her mental and physical slavery, but there can be spiritual ruts as well as tangible ones, and she could not visualize the light-hearted, bonny, athletic girl that she had been at eighteen, when the shock of her father's sudden death had sent her mother to bed, a nervous invalid.

A mental shudder shook her as she recalled those first black months of rebellion at her fate. There had been no question about it from the very first, for the house and a tiny annuity to her

mother had comprised her easy-going father's estate. Norma, a baby of eight, and Elinor, stoically working her way through college without a murmur at her changed fortunes, had been out of the question. The care of the mother and of the house had almost automatically fallen upon those slender, straight, eighteen-year-old shoulders.

The only protest had come from the headmaster of the high school. He had spoken his mind vigorously and profanely, although to no purpose, and three months later he had sent his star pupil her diploma. It still lay, blistered with hot tears of rebellion, under her meager array of lingerie in the lowest drawer of the hideous old black-walnut bureau in the room she shared with Norma.

Hot tears started again under her eyelids as she thought of that slender, yellowed roll of parchment. It was to have been her shield and buckler in a glorious battle with the world—that thrilling, unknown world which awaits the conquering sword of every eager-eyed graduate. For four long years she had led her classes, battling for that prized bit of paper, and then—

The raucous blast of the postman's whistle sounded through the silent house. Julia got up dispiritedly and went into the hall. In the letter box she found a catalogue of furs for Norma and a bulky letter addressed to herself.

For a moment her heart stopped. She knew the writing instantly, although it had been twelve years since she had seen it. Bob Hilliard, valedictorian of his class—and hers. Trembling a little, she sank down upon the lowest stair and opened the envelope.

After a moment, words began to take shape and meaning:

And so at last—at such a very long last, Julia!—I've made good. Not as I expected by locating a gold mine, but a little filtering device of mine has proved a good thing, and

the company that has paid me many, many thousands for it has made me superintendent of the plant as well. So the rolling stone has at last rolled into his own niche, Jule, and can beg the stay-at-home gem to share it with him. Will you, Jule? You always knew, in the old days, that you were my girl, the only girl, didn't you, Jule? There's been no other woman even remotely in my life, dear. I've written you this hundreds of times in all these years. It was my safety valve, but I just cached the letters, for most times I haven't even had a roof over my head or a cent in my pocket—a veritable vagabond, Jule. But those days are gone forever, dear, and I want my wife and my home. Jule, I've always managed to keep in touch with things at home a little. I know how your poor mother will miss you, but she'll have Elinor, and the kiddie must have grown to be a great girl by this time. They'll have to take their turn—

"Julia! Julia Carberry!"

The high, querulous voice floated down the long staircase. Anger had raised its pitch, and it sounded surprisingly close at hand.

"Julia Carberry! Am I to starve here, I'd like to know? What are you dawdling over in that basement? Here it is nine o'clock, and you know I'm like a rag until I have my coffee. Oh, dear! I wish your poor father had lived to see this day! How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is indeed! Well, the time is coming when you won't have your poor old mother to wait on. I won't trouble you much longer, Julia."

"Mother! I'm coming this instant!"

With trembling fingers, she thrust the letter down the neck of the percale gown and fled into the kitchen.

Her orderly mind was in chaos, but the invalid's tray with which she pres-



"I hate water!" moaned her mother. "I don't see why I have to be disturbed at this unearthly hour, anyway."

ently mounted the stairs was dainty and appetizing.

"Julia," said her mother fretfully, as she adjusted a pink shawl about her shoulders, "I wish to Heaven you'd take off that hideous rag before doctor comes! It makes you look ten years older than you need to look. Your hands, too! Oh, I can't understand why you girls didn't take after my side of the house! Why, at forty, your poor dear father used to say I had the prettiest hands in the world."

"They're lovely still," murmured her daughter, daintily removing the shell from a soft boiled egg. "Is your coffee just right? More cream?"

"I hope you don't call this blue abomination cream!" retorted Mrs. Carberry with asperity. "I'd like to see the milkman who would dare pass off that stuff on me, but you haven't a

grain of business sense, Julia. You're too meek with the tradespeople. They need to be kept severely in their places. If I were around, I wouldn't be forced to eat eggs which were antique in Noah's day nor drink chicory for coffee!"

Silently straightening up the disordered room, Julia listened by force of habit to the stream of complaints, at one moment querulous, the next acidulous. Once, as she stooped, the hidden letter cracked sharply, and her mother threw her a suspicious glance which she did not see.

At ten o'clock, the doctor came, a bluff, ruddy-faced man of sixty, with closely curling iron-gray hair. He smiled at Julia as he stepped into the broad, old-fashioned hall. In deference to her mother's command, she had changed her house gown for a plain white blouse and black skirt. A bit of color, the size of a carnation bud, bloomed in her pale cheeks, and there was about her a veiled and subtle air of radiance.

The big doctor eyed her in puzzled fashion.

"You're looking better," he told her bluntly, "though how you manage it beats me. How's the incubus to-day?"

"Doctor Gregory! I wish you wouldn't, even in fun," she protested quickly. "Poor mother! She has so much to bear."

"And poor Julia nothing at all," he countered gravely. "Well, you're right, my dear. Self-pity never helped one of us yet and never will. I wish you had a big, strapping husband, Julia, but the men nowadays have no eyes and no sense. They rush after the pretty butterfly girls with not a thimbleful of sense in their fluffy heads and expect them to become female Solomons the morning after marriage, besides accumulating all the virtues, accomplishments, and culinary abilities that go to



The doorbell pealed sharply, insist-

make a perfect wife. They expect it, but they don't get it. And now, having got that out of my system, I'll go up for a powwow with our early-Christian martyr, my dear."

Julia watched his broad back as he mounted the stairs, the air of radiance growing stronger about her like an aura; then she went swiftly into the silent, darkened parlor and drew out her letter. It was warm from contact with her white flesh, and shamefacedly she held it against her cheek for a moment. Flushed and trembling, she turned to the last closely written pages.



ently. Julia's hand flew to her heart. "You go Norma!" she begged.

And so, if all goes well, I shall be with you almost as soon as this scrawl. Jule, I suppose I'll seem like a big, strange brute to you, but you shan't say no. I won't have it. You're mine and I'm yours, just as in our school days, and I firmly believe that because our happiness has been so long delayed, it will be all the sweeter.

I wonder how you look. That great golden braid and the dimple in your chin—I hope no man has ever kissed your chin, Jule, as I shall kiss it. Get out all your party fixings for a glorious good time, and then you and I, dear, will hike back to my mountains. You'll love them as I do some day soon. There's a steadfastness, a sureness about them that has always made me think of you, Jule, and next to my wife, I

shall always love my mountains. There's a line somewhere—"Lift your eyes unto the hills," isn't it?—that's helped me many a time when I've been indigo blue with hope deferred, but that's all past now. All my dreams, Jule, will come true when I can sign myself Your loving husband,

ROBERT HILLIARD.

Her golden braid! Her party fixings! The carnation buds faded from her cheeks as she folded the letter slowly and replaced it in her blouse. Party fixings! Her mind leaped quickly to the little space that was hers in the closet upstairs. Two out-of-date cloth skirts, four plain white blouses, a

slimsy, faded cotton gown or so—that was her wardrobe, hung in a corner behind Norma's filmy, silky, lacy things, which crowded the closet to overflowing.

"I'll have to buy something decent—silk, of course—money or no money," she told herself, panic-stricken at the daring thought. "And my hair—I'll wash it just as soon as the doctor goes and use plenty of borax. Perhaps it will lighten up a bit. Oh, Bob, Bob, there's been nobody to care for so long and I've grown into just a homely, sober, dull old maid, boy! You'll repent of your letter when you see me. Twelve years is an eternity in a woman's life."

"Julia?"

It was Doctor Gregory's voice from the doorway, professionally even and yet with an undercurrent of exasperation that reached Julia's keenly sensitive ears.

"Yes, doctor. You found mother—no worse?"

"Worse? I wish my heart were as strong as hers," he said grimly. "Julia, your mother is as sound as an oak. She'll bury you, though, unless something happens. One of these days, you'll break and break hard. You've been living on your nerves for some time. You can't go on much longer, my dear. If you'd only take a little vacation and let me try my cold-water treatment—by the bucketful—on your mother while you're gone!"

Julia smiled at his grim face, one hand lightly pressing the wonderful letter in her blouse.

"You're perfectly incorrigible, doctor! Poor mother! Haven't you a grain of sympathy for all her suffering?"

Doctor Gregory jammed his hat down hard on his curly mane of hair and muttered an impolite word under his breath.

"Not a grain," he said shortly. "She

overdrew her account at my bank long ago. When I look at you, a perfect wife and mother, I see red, Julia. I wish you'd agree to that cold-water business, my dear. I give you my word it would work. Oh, yes, yes, of course! I'm an old brute! Always was. But I'll look in again next week, Julia. Regards to Norma and the erudite Elinor. Good-by, nice girl."

There is something poignantly pathetic in the flowering of a belated love affair. To the observer, it savors oftentimes of most amusing comedy; to the actors—especially those who hold the distaff—it is tragedy, pure and simple. A middle-aged Cupid is unthinkable, and that light frost of silver on the temples which so often distinguishes a man always extinguishes the woman.

Errant thoughts like these ran disconnectedly through Julia Carberry's tired head at six o'clock that afternoon, as she tried to arrange the rebellious masses of her too dry hair before the mirror in Elinor's room.

The day had been especially hard. The cool morning had changed into a torrid noon, but she had cleaned the big, shabby rooms in a frenzy of haste. Twice her mother had demanded alcohol baths, and uncounted times she had climbed the two flights of stairs from the basement kitchen with orangeade or ice water or to fan the uneasy woman in the bed, and her tired muscles ached abominably. Hoping to soften the irritated Norma, she had snatched the time to bake a chocolate layer cake and had whipped sulky cream for the girl's favorite gelatine dessert. The table she had daintily set in unwonted bravery of embroidered doilies and best china. That was for the fastidious Elinor, whose plan of living at Chapter House must now be abandoned.

Well, it was only fair, she told herself miserably, eying her pale reflec-

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tion in the glass. Let Elinor and Norma take their turn, as Bob had said they ought. It was only just that she should have her one chance at happiness. Mountains! How she longed to ease her tired eyes with their bold and rugged outlines! How she ached to expand her house-cramped lungs in their revivifying airs!

And Bob! Big, handsome, lovable, but vagabondish Bob Hilliard, who had held her only in his heart all these years—would he seem like a stranger or could they go back to that half-teasing, half-loving comradeship which had been theirs in those far-off school days? He had kissed her twice—furtive, passionless kisses—under the white lilac by the gate. She had thrilled a little, she remembered, and had stood awkwardly silent and the next moment he had laughed it off, his pleasant voice a little husky, perhaps. They had been too young, too immature for love, real love. But now—

She caught up a soft gray dress of Elinor's and slipped into it, her eyes misty with happy tears. The clinging lines of the filmy stuff molded themselves to her figure. The white column of her throat rose from its soft folds in a way that satisfied even her sternly critical eyes, but her colorless face killed the effect of the gown. With a little tormented sound she caught up Norma's box of rouge and delicately tinted her pale cheeks.

The effect was marvelous and exquisite. She bloomed, as she had at eighteen.

"There, you poor thing!" she said soberly. "I knew you had it in you. You aren't quite an antique yet, but, oh, why do we have to lose our youth? We women have so little, so pitifully little, to face the world with, and fight as we will, it goes so very soon. I wish, oh, how I wish, I could be twenty again!"

A door banged below. Then Nor-

ma's light feet ran up the stairs to her room. She banged that door as well.

Julia, her hand at her white throat where a frightened pulse was beating, opened the door of Elinor's room and listened. From across the hall came the sound of her mother's even breathing as she slept.

Reassured, Julia shut the door noiselessly and turned back to the mirror. She had paled when Norma's door had slammed and the rouge stood out in hectic patches upon her white skin. She stared at herself, distaste in her eyes.

"You cheat!" she said thickly. "You painted lie!"

She stood a moment, quivering in every tense nerve and muscle. Then she stripped off the gray gown and dragged down her heavy hair and screwed it up again in its everyday, unbecoming knot. The rouge she fiercely removed with a bit of cotton dipped in cold cream. Then she put on her white blouse and black skirt and went quietly downstairs.

Norma came down presently, dressed for a dance in a misty white-and-silver little dress. It was at least three months old, and Norma despised it accordingly. She had a string of imitation pearl beads about her lovely young throat, and the daring bodice revealed every curve of her slimly virginal shoulders and arms.

She was still sulky, and she picked petulantly at the food upon her plate. Elinor had not come in, and her empty chair roused the younger sister to contemptuous comment. With the rapier tongue of youth, she gibed at the waste of doilies and shining silver upon a mere stenographer. Even the whipped cream and the chocolate cake could not sweeten her bitter little tongue. Elinor's real or fancied superiority was the gall and wormwood of her young life.

"If I'd had half the chance she's had," she said enviously, "college and

all that, I'd be something more than a drudge of an old-maid schoolma'am. But I never had a chance. Neither did you, poor old middler. Oh, heavens, Jule, don't you just near die wishing we were rich? Other people have money left to them lots of times. Why haven't we a rich uncle in Australia or Timbaktu or somewhere? Oh, I just loathe being poor! I just despise poverty! And it's worse, being a Carberry, because we're invited everywhere and never a decent rag to go in! If I get a chance, I'm going in the movies or on the stage. You meet rich people there and I'd——"

The doorbell pealed sharply, insistently. Julia's hand flew to her heart.

"You go, Norma!" she begged.

Norma closed her white little teeth in another piece of cake and cocked an alert eye at the clock.

"Too early for Ted," she decided calmly, helping herself to more gelatine. "One of Elinor's everlasting book agents, probably. You go, Jule. My new pumps hurt terribly."

Julia got up slowly. Something in her white, strained face arrested her sister's attention, and she followed the white-bloused figure into the hall.

Julia swung open the street door. Its width hid her momentarily behind it, and in that moment she heard a strangled cry and a laugh as Hilliard



Hilliard looked wistfully after her flying figure.

rushed in, his eyes devouring the white-and-silver Norma in the glare of the hall light.

"Jule!" he cried rapturously.

The next moment his big arms had closed strongly around the slender form and he had kissed Norma's red mouth.

A knife turned slowly in the elder sister's heart. She leaned against the sheltering door and waited.

Norma freed her pretty hand and slapped her captor smartly on his tanned cheek, but she giggled as she



"Letter?" she murmured vaguely, and the instant relief in his eyes sickened her.

"Oh, just a letter to warn you of my arrival," he explained hastily, "Were you going out? This amazing replica of you looks so festive——"

"Yes, a dance," broke in the younger girl. "Oh, couldn't you come, too? Ted won't mind, and we're always so short of dancing men. You dance, of course?"

"Most partial to it," he assured her gravely.

"There's Ted," announced the radiant Norma, as a staccato horn blared a summons from the street. "I'll run up for my coat."

Hilliard looked wistfully after her flying figure, then turned to the quiet woman by the door.

"Well, Jule," he began uneasily, "I suppose I owe you a million apologies, but when I saw that lovely thing, so like you when I went away, I lost my head for a moment. I forgot the years, Jule. Why, I counted seven gray hairs this very morning!"

She looked at him—the upright, easy carriage, the broad shoulders and slender hips of the athlete, the tanned face, so alert, so finely chiseled. The chin had lost its immaturity, but the eyes were boyish still, and the way in which they avoided her own hurt her to the core of her soul.

"The years have been kind to you," she said. "Here's Norma. We'll have a talk some other time."

did so. It was evident that she was not at all displeased, but she pushed herself loose from him and lifted her flower face.

"You great bear!" she said, giggling still. "I'm not Jule. I'm Norma and you must be Bob Hilliard. Jule's had your picture on the dresser for perfect ages. Oh, Jule, isn't it perfectly killing? He took me for you, and I got your kisses!"

Julia came forward slowly. If only her voice wouldn't tremble! She put a cool hand into Bob's.

"Quite a joke, isn't it?" she said evenly. "I suppose Norma does look as I did aeons ago. Have you been in town long?"

He was staring at her, miserable bewilderment in his eyes.

"Didn't you get my letter?" he blurted.

Again the knife turned in Julia's heart. It had come to her what she must do.

"You're not coming?" he demanded quickly.

Norma answered for her.

"Silly! Poor old Jule hasn't been to a dance since the flood. She wouldn't know one of the new dances. Come on. It makes Ted rabid to wait. By-by, Jule. Don't wait up for me. Come on, Mr.—Bob!"

They had actually gone! Julia stood there under the hall light a long minute, numb, utterly incapable of feeling. Her mother's voice, shrill, unbelievably near, roused her.

"Julia Wentworth Carberry! Am I to scream my lungs out all night? Here I am exhausted with the heat of this terrible day and my own daughter will not even fetch me a glass of water! What are you mooning about? Turn down that gas! It must be a hundred in this house now. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Why do I have to live on to be a burden to every one? Neglected, left to die of thirst! Take me, O Lord, to Thyself! Take me from my wicked, ungrateful children!"

A third sponge bath, more orangeade, and an hour's fanning relieved the ensuing attack of hysteria. At twelve, spent beyond belief, Julia threw herself upon the bed she shared with Norma. She could not even think, but before her closed, yet sleepless eyes there unrolled a panorama of endless days. They were always the same—those days. Chained to a door, she watched Hilliard, in his irreproachable evening clothes, catch the gleaming figure of Norma in his arms and kiss her red lips and, as he did so, a knife turned slowly in the watcher's heart.

A cool September quickened that year into an ardent October of glowing, passionate days and strangely warm nights. Apple trees wore their pink-and-white robes again; farmers boasted of wonderful second crops of berries; and still Hilliard lingered. The

days he spent in the near-by city on business for his company, but his evenings were devoted to Norma and to Norma's pleasures.

His old friends were quick to seek him out, also. A successful friend is always remembered, and Hilliard's clothes, his air of easy command, his smart motor, all proclaimed him successful. Many were the mothers who deluged him with dinner invitations or tactfully worded requests to drop in at the more cosily intimate Sunday-night teas. Maids were dispensed with at these functions, and girls and young men guests set the tables and served salads and cold tongue, preserves and sponge cake, lemonade and scandal, with gales of laughter and much furtive love-making. Many a match that culminated in the solemn grandeur of St. Peter's had had its inception in the hilarity of one of these Sunday-night kitchens.

Hilliard avoided most of these affairs unless Norma was present. He haunted the girl's steps, showered her with gifts. With Elinor, too, he found favor, and she delayed her removal to Chapter House the better to matronize a bit the young and utterly heedless Norma.

Julia alone avoided him. When he was at the house, she found something to do upstairs. She had burned the letter and his photograph and she was gentle with Norma in her fits of petulance, but more than that she could not force herself to do. When Hilliard spoke directly to her, she answered him with her beautiful, grave courtesy, but never of her own will did she speak to him.

Her mother's attitude surprised her at times. More than once she had caught the invalid's gaze fixed thoughtfully upon her quiet face, and one warm evening her mother ventured a cryptic remark.

"Julia," she said testily, "seems to

me you haven't a mite of ordinary spunk! Where's your spirit of 1776? To give up the fight without one battle!"

Julia smiled gravely. She hesitated a moment before she made an equally cryptic answer.

"One generally fights to keep possession, but in my case I never possessed if I must fight to keep it."

Mrs. Carberry snorted.

"You're just a clear fool, Julia!" she said, shutting her eyes. "Turn out that light. I'm going to take a nap. Where's Elinor?"

"Writing letters in the den, and Norma's gone motoring. I think there's a dance at the country club. Anyway, they'll be late. Shall I get you a drink before your nap?"

"No!" snapped her mother. "And you needn't stay in this room, either! You make me nervous, mooning around all the time. Go downstairs and read something to improve your mind."

Julia went soberly down the stairs. Through an open doorway, she could see Elinor's brown head bent absorbedly over her work. The silence of the house was depressing. She opened the door and stepped out on to the moon-drenched veranda.

The warm season had given the honeysuckles a second youth. Poignantly sweet clusters of the elfin blossoms spilled perfume in the grasp of the light wind. Motors sped swiftly along the road, laughing groups in every one. Neighbor lights twinkled cheerfully. From the distance came the sound of a baby's fretful cry. A hound bayed mysteriously at the moon. A mother's voice called reluctant children to bed. Insects cheeped shrilly and lovers whispered behind vines and trellises.

Julia looked up at the moon riding triumphantly at her moorings in mid-heaven. The girl's hair was fixed for

the night in two long, heavy braids framing her face, and her slimy gown had been discarded for a blue kimono, silver in the moonlight.

"Everybody's so busy just living," she said clearly, puzzled at the ache in her heart which is every unmated woman's portion when the full moon shines, "just living as best they can. Just doing the little homely things that I do myself, but somehow with such a difference! It must be because they—belong. What a wonderful feeling it must be—to belong!"

Suddenly her hands shut out the too bright moonlight.

"Dear God, if they'd only go away!" she whispered passionately.

Quick steps came up the walk. Before she could do more than rise, Hilliard stood hatless before her.

"Norma?" she gasped.

"Dancing holes in her pumps, I suspect," he returned gayly. "Why, Jule, what a round-faced little girl you are with your hair fixed like that!"

"Don't!" she protested sharply, and shrank back from his outstretched hand.

The hand fell instantly.

"You're quite right," he said slowly. "I suppose I've forfeited all right to say things like that to you."

"I must go in," she replied hurriedly. "If there's anything you want, I'll get it for you."

"There's just one thing I want! I've been here three weeks and you've spoken about a dozen words to me. I want a talk with my old—friend."

"But we've so little to talk about," she burst out desperately. "Your friends are not mine. I—I dropped out years ago, you see."

"Yes, I see!" retorted Hilliard with heat. "I see a great deal! I see so much that I almost froth at the mouth sometimes. Sit down just a minute, Jule." He pulled her down upon a settee behind the fragrant honeysuck-

les. "Now," he said grimly, "we're going to have a little spleen-to-spleen talk."

"About Norma?"

"Confound Norma!" said Mr. Robert Hilliard very deliberately.

Julia cast a terror-stricken glance at his frowning face. What had that heedless child been doing? What had they quarreled about now?

"Norma," went on Hilliard evenly, "has been shoved down my throat ever since, under false pretenses, she stole your kisses, Jule. I'm tired of it. She's almost beautiful, but she's also the most heartlessly selfish thing living."

"She's only young," murmured the elder sister.

"You were never like that," he insisted. "Jule, why did you lie to me about that letter?"

Julia lifted a blanched face.

"Who told?" she whispered.

Hilliard smiled.

"Your mother. She's a good old scout, after all, and a friend in need. Jule, that awful first night I saw her—and she saw that I saw her—leaning over the balustrade watching me make a consummate ass of myself with Norma. The other day, Jule, I went to see old Doc Gregory. He told me that she's as sound as a dollar. So yesterday, after our reverend friend had been to call and condole with her upon the inscrutable ways of Providence, I sneaked in and put my case strong to mother. Either doc's cold-water cure and a speedy word to the gossips about these little trips of hers to watch people reading letters and kissing the wrong girl or—she's going to brace up and come out to visit us next year. And, Jule—she chose bracing up!"

Stunned beyond speech, Julia shut her eyes upon a whirling universe. When she looked upon a placid moon again, Hilliard's hand had covered hers.

"But Norma——" she stammered. "I thought you idolized Norma."

Hilliard flushed under his tan. He lifted her chin with his free hand and looked deep into her grave, bewildered eyes.

"Dear," he said, "I wonder how big and—and understanding you are. I know you're mighty fine, Jule, but women can't always understand how great a fool a man can be. I was crazy about Norma; first because she looked like you and then because of my own conceit. She made me feel young and elated and joyous, but it didn't last. It couldn't. It was artificial, anyway, and I'd been through too much to be boyishly gay all the time. Norma couldn't comprehend those moods. She didn't measure up—that's all. And then I began to see that only my eyes had been dazzled with Norma—that my heart was still hungry for the girl who was like my mountains. I'm very humble, dear. What will you do with me? You never had very much pity for fools in the old days, but as you are strong, be merciful."

Julia's lashes fell, then rose again. A more exquisite pink than any artist ever painted bloomed in her face. Her eyes had lost their dull, quiet look. Youth had come back to her on the wings of sudden joy. Her lover, his heart beating thickly in his ears, leaned nearer.

"Jule," he whispered, "out home, on the mesa, there blooms a little white flower. It grows in the shelter of a gray rock, and its stalk is always slender and straight. When any one plucks this little flower and sets it in the sun for a while, a rosy miracle takes place. The little white blossom turns pink, Jule, and, oh, the fragrance! Dear, I know a girl so like that white flower of the mesa, and I want so mighty hard to watch her turn pink—in the sun. Do you think I shall, Jule?"

And upstairs a very sober old lady closed the slats of the blind with cautious fingers and marched thoughtfully back to bed.

Billy and the Christmas Spirit

By Winifred Arnold

Author of "Mrs. Radigan's Picnic," "The Parlow Reunion," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY S. B. ASPELL

He "squashed" it—and very sensibly, too.

TO Billy, pleasantly engaged in making intaglios of his person in the four inches of snow which had fallen overnight, came the voice of his older sister Ellen for at least the third time in two minutes.

"Billy!" she cried. "Billy! Oh, Bil-ly!"

Billy turned a deaf ear. He expected, of course, to respond in due season, but he had the subconscious feeling common to small boys that a certain amount of calling was a part of the performance.

Ellen's voice grew louder and shriller.

"Billy!" she called again. "Billy! Bil-lee!"

Billy rose slowly and surveyed his latest image with considerable scorn. In that overcoat, he might almost as well be a girl. Hastily he began to strip off the misleading garment.

"Billy Palmer!" Ellen's voice fairly bristled with exasperation. And when she reached the "Billy Palmer!" stage, the situation was becoming more serious. She might even start out to investigate.

Shrugging himself back into his overcoat, Billy lounged carelessly around the protecting corner of the garage.

At sight of him, another "Billy Palmer" died in midair.

"Oh, here you are at last!" cried Ellen wrathfully, as if his appearance were a personal affront. "Why didn't you answer? I called and called!"

"Was you a-calling me?" inquired Billy innocently.

"Yes, I was!" retorted Ellen with heat. "And you heard me all the time! I know you did! Didn't you?"

But Billy, though he was now prepared to do his part as a man and a brother, saw no necessity for making damaging admissions. A decade or so later, he would begin to mutter something about "business." Being only nine, he merely ignored the question.

"Well, whaddya want?" he inquired briefly.

Ellen's answer tacitly admitted defeat, though she did not lay aside her authoritative manner.

"You come right in the house, Billy Palmer," she commanded. "Mother wants you to carry some Christmas presents to people. I'm going to start right away with my basketful."

The mask of wary indifference which had covered Billy's countenance relaxed. Ordinary errands were a nuisance, of course, but Billy rather fancied himself in the rôle of an amateur Santa Claus.

To begin with, there was the pleasant feeling of vicarious gift-giving; and then people, particularly relatives, were more than likely to press you to come in just long enough to eat a large piece of cake or an orange, and then of their own accord help you to break away without spending any more time in meaningless conversation—exactly Billy's ideal of a pleasant social call.

"Sure!" agreed Billy cheerfully and presented himself without delay in the blue guest room, where mother was doing up her last packages, assisted by Aunt Bessie.

"Here I am, mother!" he announced in businesslike tones. "Shall I begin on the bunch here by the door? And can I get Tom Breman to help me?"

But Mrs. Palmer, like all mothers, had her subconscious ideas, too, about the necessary preliminaries of any performance involving small boys.

"Go into the bathroom first and scrub your hands well," she commanded automatically, without even glancing up.

"Aw, mother!" protested Billy. "I don't need to wash my hands. Why, I'm going to wear mittens."

"Wear mittens! As if that made any difference! Go right along and do as I say."

There was an unusual touch of irritability in mother's pleasant voice, before which Billy promptly retreated toward the scene of so many unnecessary ablutions. But not in time to save himself from the further indignity of:

"Use plenty of hot water, and soap and wash your ears, too."

Ears, too! What was the woman thinking of? What had ears to do with Christmas presents? Hands maybe, but not ears!

Forgetful of his former failure, Billy turned upon the threshold of the bathroom door.

"Aw, mother!" he protested futilely. "I'm going to wear my skating cap, and it comes way d——"

"William Wellington Palmer!" began mother superbly, and then her tone broke under the weight of six feverish weeks of Christmas preparedness. "Oh, Billy," she begged, "don't stop to argue now! I'm so tired I can't bear it! Go wash your hands and ears like a good boy, and *don't* talk!"

And Billy, wise with the accumulated wisdom of eight previous Christ-

mases, went. Through his splashings, however, he listened carelessly to the conversation that filtered in from the guest room.

"Oh, Mary," Aunt Bessie was saying, "this luncheon set is really the loveliest thing! Don't you hate to give it away?"

A crackle of tissue paper—then mother's voice:

"Indeed I do, Bess—*like a dog!* I really made it for myself, you know, and of course Aunt Eliza will never appreciate how much work it was. Besides, I'd much rather have it, of course, than anything she'll give me. She has such funny, old-fashioned taste."

"Still, I suppose after last year——" suggested Aunt Bessie.

"Oh, yes, it had to be the handsomest thing we could possibly manage. I've made Henry give her a stunning Russian samovar that I wanted terribly myself for the dining room. She was almost as furious as Aunt Ellen, you know. And Heaven knows we couldn't afford to risk anything like that again!"

Another pause filled with crackles.

"What a heavenly book!" cried Aunt Bessie. "These illustrations are just too exquisite! Who's that for, Mary?"

"Mrs. Dudley Sartoris." Mother's voice "registered" patient resignation. "And of course she'll give me a majolica pitcher or something like that. She always does."

There followed a résumé of Mrs. Sartoris' gifts, past, present, and probable, blighting contrasted with those bestowed upon her by Mrs. Palmer.

At this point Billy entered, only to be promptly sent back with the scathing remark:

"Just look at the back of your neck!"

As it was obviously impossible to regard this as a command and obey it, Billy contented himself with splashing the wash cloth noisily around in the basin of water for what he considered

a suitable length of time, while he idly collected further bits of information.

Mother, it was very evident from the conversation, was about to pour out upon an unappreciative world a collection of the most beautiful gifts, all of which she wanted to keep herself. In return, she expected to receive a number of utterly valueless trifles for which she had no earthly use.

And that was what grown-ups called a Merry Christmas! Gee, but it was fierce to be a lady! And Billy's latent chivalry suddenly awoke before this spectacle of downtrodden femininity.

Even the beautiful green-and-gold vase for which he had parted with the whole of a quarter in Higgins' Bargain Basement could hardly make up for all the junk with which the rest of the world was going to afflict her. Why didn't she revolt? Why didn't she just keep the things herself? Probably that simple solution had never occurred to her. He would suggest it. And with the washcloth still dripping in his hand, he dashed to the guest-room door.

"Say, mother," he began eagerly, "why do you bother to send me around with those things? Why don't you just keep 'em here an'——"

But Mrs. Palmer, connecting the



"Say, mother," he began eagerly, "why do you bother to send me around with those things? Why don't you just keep 'em here an'——"

speech with Billy's enforced ablutions rather than with her own conversation, quite misunderstood his motives.

"Why, Billy," she cried reproachfully, "can it be that you aren't willing to help mother by carrying a few bundles for her?"

"But you said you wanted to keep 'em yourself," mumbled Billy. "You said they were just what you liked yourself an'——"

But, to mother, this was merely a shifty subterfuge.

"Put on your cap and coat, Billy," she said coldly. "And never let me hear you talk that way again. The things you like yourself are just the ones to give away. Christmas is just the time to live up to the Golden Rule. *Where is your Christmas spirit?*"

Up till this last sentence, Billy had been preparing to defend his character from unjust aspersions, but that reference effectually tied his tongue. If Billy had been pressed for a definition of the Christmas spirit, by recognized authority, he would probably have mumbled out something fairly orthodox. But the picture that the phrase really called up in his secret soul was of a bogie compact of gloom. Partly vampire it was, partly vulture, but all kill-joy. If that creature was on the warpath again, there was no more to be said. He sighed resignedly.

There were, however, many things to be thought, and as Billy wandered down the street with his basket, his mind ran back over the past conduct of that mischievous beast. Last year it had concocted engraved cards which had chastely informed the world at large of the cordial holiday sentiments of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Benedict Palmer. Billy hadn't objected so much to those personally, for, by some strange good fortune, they had been visited only on adults, but he knew that their consequences had been dire.

Mother's two wealthy relatives, Great-aunt Eliza and Great-aunt Ellen, had been deeply incensed—"awful mad," Billy phrased it to himself. Even when mother had explained, in tears, they had failed in some way to recognize the beauty of a "Christmas spirit" which cut them off with engraved cards, instead of their usual handsome presents.

And that Great-aunt Ellen had taken the matter really to heart had become painfully evident in late July, when she had succumbed suddenly to the intense

heat. In her will, her executors had been directed to send to the family of her niece Mary a specially engraved card—expressive of the sincere regard of Miss Ellen Wellington—and nothing else!

To Billy, of course, this had been a sort of secondhand suffering, but the spirit's activities of the Christmas before had touched him in a vital spot. For that year it had rooted out the questionable sentiment that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." The idea had never really appealed to Billy's innate common sense, but he and Ellen had finally succumbed to mother's glowing eloquence about the rewards of the Christmas spirit and had promised to pass on the contents of their stockings and tree to the children at the orphan asylum that mother helped to manage.

It had been a hideous day! Billy and Ellen had not grasped the fact that the rewards which had lured them on were to be purely spiritual; and when the Christmas spirit had failed to meet its obligations with such tangible assets as dolls and drums, their wails had filled the air.

The arrival of Grandma Mason on the scene, with the promise of toys galore on the morrow, had partly saved the situation, but as a Christmas, it had been a rank failure, nevertheless. Even mother herself had declared—after the well-sounding, but questionable manner of parents—that her day had been even more spoiled than theirs.

If so—Billy again reverted to the present—why was she hunting more trouble by digging up that old Christmas spirit again? He stopped to kick viciously at a water hydrant as if it were the spirit in person. Give away the things you wanted most yourself—get things you didn't care a red cent for—and then expect to have a Merry Christmas!

Once more Billy stood appalled be-

fore the adult lack of common sense. She would hate the results, just as she always did. It was time indeed for somebody to come to the rescue! And reflecting upon the wise purchase of that green-and-gold vase, which he himself had never grudged his mother for an instant, Billy realized that he was undoubtedly the one chosen of Heaven for that purpose. Thrilling with this high resolve, he ascended Great-aunt Eliza's steps. That lady herself opened the door.

"Humph!" she ejaculated, at sight of her great-nephew and his load. "What's this? More Christmas spirit?"

"No, siree!" responded Billy; and then, realizing that his enthusiasm was carrying him beyond the bounds of truth, he corrected himself. "It was," he admitted honestly. "But I'm going to squish it this time."

A grim smile touched the corners of Aunt Eliza's lips.

"Squish what?" she inquired briefly. "Christmas spirit," answered Billy with some heat, as he entered and placed his burden on the black walnut hatrack. "It's the meanest old thing that ever was. It's spoiled Christmas for mother and the rest of us hundreds and hundreds of times. But I'm not going to stand it any longer. This year it's going to be squashed!"



Such appreciation of his society that austere lady had never before shown.

"Humph!" said Aunt Eliza again. "What's the thing up to this year?"

"Making her give other folks things she likes lots better than the old junk they'll give her," explained Billy eagerly. Conversation with Aunt Eliza was surprisingly easy to-day somehow. "Things they won't never appreciate."

"Such as?" interrupted Aunt Eliza, reaching a commanding hand toward the basket. "Show me mine, young man."

Billy obediently rooted out the "Dearest Aunt Eliza" package and handed it over.

"And father's going to give you a rushing Sammy-jar or sump'n." Billy's

mind groped feebly toward the Toby-jug which was his particular admiration. "Mother wanted it dreadfully for the dining room."

"That thingumbob came yesterday," returned Aunt Eliza, whipping open the beribboned package and surveying mother's proud handiwork with an impassive countenance. "Well, young man, what are you going to do about it? Here, eat this apple while you tell me."

"Just ask folks—to give 'em back," said Billy between bites, "and keep their own. Then mother'll have what she likes—for once—and the house won't be cluttered up—with things she don't want."

"Fine idea!" commented Aunt Eliza with her usual brevity. "You can count me in on that, sir. I'll send these holey mats back to-morrow, along with that Sammy-jar thing, and spend my own money for some decent table linen. Whom else are you going to see? And what else you going to say? Here's another apple."

Such appreciation of his society that austere lady had never before shown.

And Aunt Eliza, it appeared, was not the only one. Other female relatives and friends with whom conversation had always been merely a wooden interchange of question and answer about the health of the various members of his family, and what he wanted for Christmas, begged him to stay, fed him, and listened with unfeigned interest to everything he had to say. Billy tasted at one and the same time the intoxicating cup of social triumph and the joy of the successful reformer.

For, to a woman, they applauded the wisdom of his plan for defeating the Christmas spirit—though only Mrs. Dudley Sartoris and one other responded instantly by returning his package intact. The others, however, all promised to do so later on, so it was with a proud consciousness of being

an unexpected joy-bringer that Billy tramped into the house just before supper time.

It was, consequently, a decided blow to have mother appear at the living-room door with a brow like a thunder-cloud.

"What *have* you been doing, Billy Palmer?" she demanded. "Cousin Flora has just telephoned— Come right here this minute—" She caught sight of the parcels in his basket and interrupted herself: "Gone all the afternoon and you haven't even delivered all the parcels!"

"Oh, yes, I did," protested Billy, eager to clear himself. "I took 'em all round. Those folks just gave 'em back. They said they'd really like better what they'd bought for you!"

"Then you did!" gasped Mrs. Palmer. "You have! Cousin Flora was right! Come in here this minute, Billy Palmer, and tell me just what awful things you've been saying!"

Billy's somewhat incoherent explanations, ending with the statement that he was trying to give her a happy Christmas for once, fell upon worse than deaf ears.

"A happy Christmas!" cried Mrs. Palmer. "A happy Christmas, insulting every friend I have and mortifying— Great Heavens, Billy, did I put Aunt Eliza's present in your basket? Don't tell me that you told Aunt Eliza that rignarole, too!"

Billy nodded miserably.

"And what did Aunt Eliza say?" Mother's tone was awful.

"She said—she would send back— those—holey mats to-morrow, along with the Sammy-jar. You *said* you wanted that Sammy-jar awfully!"

"Sammy-jar!" cried mother, as if that name were the last straw, and collapsed hysterically upon the davenport. "I wish your father— Oh, here he is! Henry, listen to what your son has been doing now!"

Father whistled.

"My son? Bad as that, is it? Well, come up here, William, and explain yourself."

Billy advanced again to the bar of justice, while father took a base advantage of the fact that he was a skillful lawyer by leading his son from one damaging admission to another.

Yes, Billy had told Mrs. Sartoris that she could keep her majolica pitcher herself, and she had said it wasn't a majolica pitcher and had asked why he thought so.

And yes, he had told Cousin Flora that mother just hated to give away that collar-and-cuff set. She liked it better than the things Cousin Flora made.

And, he *had* told Great-aunt Eliza how they all felt about Aunt Ellen's engraved card—which he blamed on the Christmas spirit. And yes, he had told her he was going to squish it. Perhaps she had been shocked. He didn't know.

Just here, mother stopped the inquisition with a groan of despair.

"Yes," she said, rising tragically from the couch, "he has said and done the very worst possible thing at every place! We shan't have a single friend or relation left that will speak to us! You've got to punish him, Henry Palmer, the way he deserves! I'm sure I can't!" Then her voice broke again. "Oh, Billy, even if you were going to do such a dreadful thing, why did you have to tell *everything* you knew?"

It was the appeal of the sex that can tell and tell and keep some secrets still—behind an ironclad barrier—to the sex which sees no cause at all for barriers, once it has opened its candid heart. Billy cast a despairing look at father, and for the first time a real man-to-man glance came back across the great divide.

"Yes, they're the dickens and all to please," it seemed to say, "and we usu-

ally mess it up frightfully when we try to make a special hit."

But father's voice, at least, was properly magisterial.

"It would seem to me——" he began, and then the telephone bell cut him short.

"I'll go," said mother. "It's undoubtedly Aunt Eliza, to inform me that that lunch set is all I need ever hope to get from her. I might as well face the music first as last." She stepped swiftly into the hall.

"I really meant," repeated Billy eagerly as she vanished, "to give her a happy Christmas for once. She said Christmas was the time to live up to the Golden Rule. And if I liked my own things better, I'd rather have folks give 'em back to me. So!"

"Until you know how to manage the Golden Rule, my son," observed father cryptically, "you're more than likely to find that it's tipped with dynamite. You'd better run up to bed now, young man. The relatives seem to have given you plenty to eat, so you won't need much supper. And next time leave your mother to tackle the Christmas spirit by herself. It'll throw *you* every time."

Mother was still telephoning at the little table under the stairs as Billy crept past.

"Oh, Fanny dear," she was saying, "it's such a weight off my mind to have you realize what a joke it all is! You're just the sweetest thing! And you'll tell Sadie, too, won't you? But imagine Aunt Eliza! I'm just *sick* when I think about Aunt Eliza! She'll never understand or forgive any of us, I know."

Later, as he lay in bed, champing drearily on the dry bread which a very top-lofty Sister Ellen had pushed in at his door in the most approved jailer manner, fragments of other telephone conversations floated up to him.

"I told him that the Christmas spirit made us give away the things we liked



"Oh, Billy!" reproved gentle Miss Mannering. "Where is your Christmas spirit?"
 "I haven't got none!" Then he added defiantly: "I—I squashed it!"

best ourselves, so the dear little goose thought I was robbing myself— Isn't it the best joke?" grew to be quite the stereotyped formula.

And such is the force of suggestion that, by the time Billy had finally burrowed his way through the pillow to the Land of Nod, he had become quite used to regarding himself as a "dear little goose" whose amiable eccentricities mother and her friends were going smilingly to condone.

But, surprise package, thy name is certainly woman! There were neither

smiles nor condoning in the breakfastable portion of the dear little goose next morning. Neither was there sugar for his oatmeal nor even his customary orange.

"People that lose their families thousands and thousands of dollars," announced mother briefly, "should not complain over little economies. Henry, *what* shall I do if she returns that samovar?"

"Keep it," returned father laconically from behind his paper. "You wanted it, didn't you?"

"Oh, I never could!" wailed mother. "I should always feel as if it were a funeral urn! Henry, don't you think I'd better telephone her?"

"Have you forgotten she hasn't any phone?" said father, lowering his paper. "Sensible woman, your Aunt Eliza. Won't be bothered with Tom, Dick, and Harry ringing her up at all hours!"

"Well, then, I shall go and call. I simply can't stand the suspense any longer!" worried mother. "Henry, why don't you answer? Don't you think I'd better go and call?"

Father lowered his paper again.

"I've told you a dozen times that I'd just let Aunt Eliza sizzle," he replied elegantly. "You can wager that she's got your number all right, Mame, and no talk about Billy's misunderstanding and all that truck is going to pull the wool over her eyes. You may hypnotize Clara Sartoris and all the rest, but you can't your Aunt Eliza."

Mother groaned.

"I never can stand the suspense!" she reiterated. "Billy, go and wash your hands this minute and get ready for school."

Deeply enveloped in clouds and darkness, Billy went and uncomplainingly scrubbed away another layer of the hands that at this rate would certainly never last him to maturity. Billy's knowledge of physical geography, though small, had taught him that much about erosion.

At school it was the same old story. More twaddle about the Christmas spirit, more nonsense about the joys of giving rather than getting, more balderdash about that highly explosive Golden Rule.

"You can't do it," he finally ejaculated, to the special scandal of the proper little miss who sat in front of him and who was drinking in these words of authority as if they were really true. "If you try to do for other folks what you'd like 'em to do for

you, they get mad as hops and don't give you nothing to eat."

"Oh, Billy!" reproved gentle Miss Mannerling. "Billy Palmer, how can you talk that way? Just at Christmas time, too, when we should all be trying to make everybody so happy! Where is your Christmas spirit?"

"I haven't got none!" answered Billy grimly. And then, emboldened by the frightened titters that ran around the room, he added defiantly: "I—I squashed it!"

The titters had now become universal. Poor Miss Mannerling felt quite unable to cope with such a heretic. Besides, such conduct did not at all fit into her schedule for the day; and to Miss Mannerling, no crime could be more heinous than to deviate from her schedule for the day.

"Then this," she pronounced, more in sorrow than in anger, "is no place for you to-day, Billy. You may go home to your mother and ask her to help you. Your dear mother is full of Christmas spirit."

Rejected of both home and school, Billy fell back upon the life of a tramp. About lunch time, the course of his wanderings took him past Great-aunt Eliza's house, and, deaf to the lessons of experience, once more he climbed her steps. This error, at least, he might be able to repair.

"Oh, Aunt Eliza," he began hastily, as that lady again opened her door, "you needn't give 'em back. She doesn't want 'em, after all. It's a funeral urn."

"Humph?" snapped Aunt Eliza, for once betraying surprise and then promptly clapping on the lid. "A funeral urn! Pretty Christmas present! Well, she's got it back by now, anyhow. I sent 'em by special messenger this morning. How do you happen to be here, young man? This isn't on your way home from school."

Mournfully, Billy detailed his adventures of the morning. Aunt Eliza's grim lips twitched.

"And so you were scared to go home, were you?" she inquired. "I don't wonder! Even George Washington got whipped, you remember—and doubtless deserved it! Still, I guess you'll find you're better off for once than the father of your country. Trot along home now, and come back at two o'clock and tell me what that nincompoop mother of yours has to say."

She shoved him unceremoniously down the steps, and Billy dazedly obeyed. Just as well, as mother had said, to face the music and get it over with.

Gently he let himself in at the front door; gently he tiptoed toward the dining room. Then suddenly he remembered that he had not washed his hands. It was a good idea to run up as many lightning rods as possible. But just as he was turning to tiptoe out to the little back-hall lavatory, the sound of his own name caught his ear.

"It's all about Billy!" mother was saying. "The most glorious surprise! Just listen, Henry, while I read it to you:

"NIECE MARY [Aunt Eliza is awfully gushing, isn't she?]: Here are your two presents back again. When I put covers on my table, I put something that will cover; and when I make tea, I like a good, old-fashioned china teapot such as my grandmother used. And I'll keep my own money and buy 'em, as your son suggests. He's got all the brains of the family, as far as I can see, and a good dose of Wellington common sense to boot. I'd been looking for it to crop out in some of my great-nephews and nieces and hadn't seen any sign so far in the whole ten of them. Why your son should have a corner on it, as they say, I don't see, unless it skipped your generation entirely, but since he has, I've decided that I needn't give all my money to the church home after all. If Henry will step around this evening, we'll draw up the will I've been planning for ten years. And this afternoon, if you'll send Billy over, we'll go down and buy him some kind of present that he wants—to keep for himself. And there won't be a stitch of Christmas spirit about it. Your aunt,

"ELIZA ANN WELLINGTON."

"Now what do you think about that?" she finished jubilantly. "Billy Aunt Eliza's heir!"

Father helped himself judiciously to another croquette.

"I think," he said, "that we can now afford to give Billy sugar and oranges for his breakfast. And as for that Christmas spirit, Mame, believe me, you'd better let it stay squashed!"



A Christmas-Tree Ornament

By Rheem Douglas

MY paper lad of tarnished gold,
With broken musket, once so fine,
You've left a former owner's hold,
But, after years, have fall'n to mine.
I know the eyes of gentian blue
That saw you, fresh from overseas
Whence came such saucy toys as you
To prank the New World's Christmas trees.

Outside, the passers crunched the snow
And sleigh bells clinked a Christmas note;
Within, the children, ranged arow,
Stood smiling, mute (for shyness smote
The boldest there), as, gemmed about,
The fir tree reared its gleaming crest,
Till two pink hands reached yearning out
And caught you to a chubby breast.

Months, years, went by. This cupboard nook
Long jailed you; but your dark hours end
To-day, wee man! I know your look,
And you shall join your earliest friend.
His gentian eyes more soft shall grow,
The dear old memories grip his throat,
While in his ears, across the snow,
The sleigh bells clink a Christmas note.

Safety First

By Grace Livingston Hill Lutz

Author of "The Voice in the Wilderness," "Elizabeth Hayden's Beauty Parlor," etc

ILLUSTRATED BY H. F. NONNAMAKER

A story of the war, and a girl whose mother wanted her to get married. There are two men it it—and a lot of other things beside.

MARCELLA KEMPER stood by the front window, looking out on a stormy sunset. Battlements of sullen gray loomed in the west like grim towers and gables, with flames of angry crimson bursting between, and here and there a thread of silver light like bayonets on the ramparts. Overhead stretched an endless, steely sky, relentlessly shutting one in to the inevitable.

There was war in the sky and war in the air! One talked of nothing else; one lived but to get the next edition of the paper to see what had happened. Flags flapped desolately in the chill evening air, showing where patriotism had got the better of the appalling thought of war.

There were seven flags on the block. Marcella had not counted them before—two at the Baileys' small and rain-streaked; a fine, large bunting of magnificent proportions floating from a tall white pole in front of the Porters'; two crossed over the front door where the old Bingham sisters lived; a real old patched revolutionary, faded and blurred, hanging from Mrs. Coates' third-story window. Mrs. Coates was a Daughter of the Revolution and wore her jeweled badge proudly on her rusty black alpaca. The seventh flag floated over the door of the doctor's office just across the road. It was medium-sized cotton, faded and dimmed. Marcella could remember the Fourth of July,

some ten years or more ago, when the doctor had brought it home and put it up all bright and new, while she and his young brother, Dudley Ward, had shot off firecrackers on the steps. It seemed but the other day!

Marcella marveled, looking drearily up and down the street. It was incredible that war was really upon the land again in this enlightened age of the world! War! The thing their grandmothers had told them about with quivering voices and dim, reminiscent eyes! Scraping lint and stripping bandages! High prices and lack of food! Farewells and death messages! War! There had been found no other way to righteousness and peace but to fight it through. All the agitation and protest had failed!

She began to wonder who on the street would go. The Bailey boys were scarcely old enough, yet they were just the kind—big, courageous fellows who would jump at the first call. Would the Porter money somehow provide a way to keep their one pampered son in a place of safety till the horror was passed, or did the size of their flag really represent the quality of their patriotism? Dudley Ward had just been graduated early from medical college to enlist. He would be coming home soon. The doctor had offered his services to the ambulance corps, and was conducting a class in Red Cross work. Marcella was planning to join.

And there was Frederick! Would Frederick enlist?

Frederick Morton was big and healthy, and just twenty-six. He would easily fall among the called if conscription should come. If he should go away to war, would he commit himself to her before he went?

It was four years, now, that he had been coming to see her two or three times a week, bringing her flowers and chocolates, taking her to entertainments, and generally monopolizing her, to the exclusion of all her other young men friends. His extreme intimacy had begun about the time that Dudley Ward had gone away to college, and he had been gradually appropriating her more and more until all her girl friends considered her engaged and laughingly asked when the wedding was to be; and yet he had never spoken a word of love or marriage!

For a long time she had been content, but of late there had been a growing uneasiness. Her mother had fallen into the habit of asking probing questions. She was beginning to be nervous and sensitive. Vague doubts stirred within her heart. Did he mean nothing but friendship? Was he, perhaps, waiting till her invalid mother should die? She always put this thought by as unworthy of her, and as far as possible forbore to analyze the situation lest the filmy meshes of her romance be broken.

Mrs. Kemper put her head in at the door.

"Marcella, did you remember to get the yeast?" Her voice was like a plaintive purr.

Yeast! In the midst of great events one must eat! How strange and mixed life was!

"No, mother. I'll get it now. They'll let me in at the side door. I won't be a minute!"

"But it's real dark! I hate for you to go alone! Since those munition

places have brought so many strange people here to work, it really isn't safe!"

Safe! Marcella caught up her sweater and fled into the dusk. How strange that her mother could think of a little fear like that when so many larger horrors loomed on the immediate horizon! If war came, women would have to forget such little shelterings and be strong!

Frederick was sitting in the big chair when she returned. Mrs. Kemper's voice was mildly reproachful, as if it were Frederick's right to have Marcella always on the spot when he arrived.

There was a suppressed air of excitement about Frederick. Marcella wondered if he were going to tell her that he had enlisted. She gave one glance out of the window as she pulled down the shade. Only a faint copper lingered in the inky clouds, like smoldering embers in a deserted camp. She did not call Frederick's attention to it. She had tried to make him see things like that before. He did not understand. It irritated him. Frederick was practical.

But Frederick did not talk about the war when they were alone. Instead, he asked her, quite as if he had often spoken of it before, if she did not think it was time they were married.

Marcella looked at him, astonished. It had come at last, that question for which she had waited so long, and it fell on her heart dully like lead that had missed its mark. She felt strangely apathetic about it—idly curious as to why he had asked her now and not before. Her eyes searched his face calmly, impersonally, in vain quest for an answer to her thoughts. Was he, perhaps, feeling that in these perilous times she, and possibly her mother, needed his protection? A soft color rose in her cheeks at the thought and a glow flamed in her eyes, but faded slowly as it met no answering glow in



"Do you think I want you to hide behind me?" she asked scornfully.

his. His cool, pleasant eyes regarded her steadily, practically, sensibly, contentedly, evidently sure of his answer.

He was, then, going to enlist? She saw herself bidding him good-by. His wife! Staying at home to wait for news of him. It was strange, but her heart did not stir at thought of his danger more than it had stirred for the Bailey boys or Twinkenham Porter or Dudley Ward. She was regarding him only as a part of the great army of those who must go. Where was the joy she would have felt a few days ago if this question had been asked her?

She studied his face tensely, silently for a moment, and her voice sounded harsh to her own ears when she spoke:

"Why do you ask me that *now*?"

A dull color stole into his handsome face. He seemed almost confused for a moment.

"Well, I hadn't intended to plan for this just yet, Marcella." His voice was almost condescending. "I wanted to wait till I was fixed a little better financially, and then I thought perhaps your mother needed you. But it begins to look very much as if the president were going to have his way about conscription, and—unmarried men will be called first."

He paused, puzzled over the expression on Marcella's face. Something he had never seen there before had flared in her eyes.

"And you do not *wish* to be called?"

"Of course not!" His voice rang sharply, accusatively. "Why, Marcella, you wouldn't want me to go to *war*, would you?" There were indignation and astonishment in his face.

Marcella looked at him with eyes from which all illusions had suddenly fallen.

"Do you think I want you to hide behind *me*?" she asked scornfully. "I've been reading about those awful soldiers over there who made screens of women and little children to shelter them as they marched into battle. How would you be better than they if you married me for that?"

Frederick sprang to his feet, white to the lips with anger.

"Marcella, I didn't take you for either a fool or a fanatic!"

"Perhaps I am both," said Marcella steadily, though her knees trembled beneath her as she rose. "Whatever I am, I know I never should have any more respect for myself—much less for you—if I allowed you to do such a thing!"

For a space, they regarded each other in silent consternation. The very room seemed hushed in panic. A dull roll of spring thunder rumbled above the house. The shade blew out with a sudden gust of wind, revealing an inky sky from which the copper had long ago died. It was as if war waited outside the door for the outcome. It was not what Marcella had dreamed it would be when he should ask her to be his wife!

A white anger burned over Frederick's face and left it dark and lowering like a coming tempest. His stubborn lips and well-chiseled chin with the cleft took on determined lines; his brows drew down enigmatically over eyes that had turned to steel points.

"You are not yourself, Marcella," he said coldly. "I'll leave you to think over what you've said to me and give me a fitting apology. I am sure no

self-respecting man would care to remain and discuss the matter after his fair proposal of marriage had been met by a comparison so odious. You know how to find me when you've come to your senses."

He made his way with dignity from the house. The door shut with a dull thud. It seemed to be slamming in the girl's heart; and on its threshold lay her tattered romance, its filmy threads hopelessly rent.

Outside, the thunder rumbled exultantly, but Marcella stood where he had left her, unable to move, her hands clasping each other painfully, and all around on the horizon of the dark world war hovered in legions of warriors coming on at the call of God and country.

Mrs. Kemper opened the dining-room door cautiously, alarm in her eyes.

"Why, what's become of Frederick?" she ventured timorously.

Marcella answered in a dry, dead voice:

"He's gone!"

"Gone! Why, isn't he coming back?"

"No, mother, he's gone for good! He's *never* coming back!" Marcella said it as if she were trying to get used to the fact herself.

Mrs. Kemper sat down as if the power that held her had suddenly been withdrawn.

"Why, Marcella! What's happened? You haven't quarreled, have you? Marcella, he *isn't* engaged to somebody else, is he?"

The girl in her agony turned on her mother desperately.

"Oh, *don't*, mother!" She dropped her head an instant and then lifted it again in a movement of strong despair. "He's a *coward*, mother! He wanted me to marry him to save him from going to war!"

Her mother looked at her bewilderedly.

"Well, why not, Marcella? You can't blame a man for not wanting to go to war. War's awful! He's been coming to see you a long while now. I don't think you ought to call him a coward."

"Yes, he's been coming to see me four years, mother, and he might have married me long ago. He knew that. He didn't want me till he got good and ready. He didn't ask me till he needed me to protect him! It's no use, mother. I couldn't ever respect him, and you can't love where you can't respect."

Mrs. Kemper looked helplessly at her.

"It would be so nice to have a man around to protect us in these war times!" she quavered.

Marcella cast a pitying glance at her.

"Protect us!" she said with a bitter curl of her lip. "If he were a real man, he'd find a bigger job in war time than protecting us! No, mother! If war comes, it's up to you and me to protect ourselves or be too busy helping others to need protecting! Don't you fret, mother, I'll protect you!" and she gave her mother a fierce, impulsive kiss and rushed upstairs.

Far into the night she sat by her open window. The shower had passed. The moon had risen fair and clear above the street. Over to the left, in the valley, the great munitions factory twinkled its myriad lights, showing where thousands of men and women worked day and night to get ready for war. They were working while men slept, risking their lives, doing their part in winning the holy war. A sudden new appreciation of their part in the great conflict swept over the girl as the midnight whistle sounded from factory to factory. Up and down the street the dim flags waved in the soft moonlight and took on a new significance. They stood for liberty, justice, for love and home and heroism that was willing to lay down its life that a land of freedom and righteousness might be possible.

Marcella came downstairs early the next morning and announced that she was going to buy a flag.

"Do you think we ought to afford one?" asked her mother dubiously. "You need a new spring suit, and we have so little to spend. Prices are so high!"

"What are new suits when our country is in trouble? We're the only people on the block without a flag, and we're going to have one!"

"Do you think it's quite safe, two women alone?" Mrs. Kemper voiced her fear anxiously. "There might be a spy around, Marcella. You can't tell what they might do. You know they flew over London and dropped *bombs* right down. You don't read the papers much. A flag might attract them."

"Safe! Oh, mother!" gasped Marcella hysterically.

"Well, I'd get a small one that can't be seen very high up."

"Mother! Isn't your country anything to you? Don't you put any trust in the protection of your flag? Don't you believe in God and righteousness? You always brought me up as if you did!"

The mother cowered at the accusation of her beautiful, indignant daughter, and watched her go down the street with a deep sigh. She never had understood Marcella.

Marcella found that the flags she wanted were too expensive for her purse, so she bought material and came home to make one. For two days she sat and stitched, eagerly, tensely, scarcely stopping to eat, her mother watching gloomily and hoping that Frederick would repent his hasty action and return before the flag was finished. It seemed like calling him names after what Marcella had said to him. If they didn't make it up, Marcella would likely never have another chance to marry now. She was twenty-four!

As Marcella stitched her big stars



The young doctor looked up at the girl with a light of triumph in his eyes. "She's going to get well," he said in a low, joyous voice, "and it is all due to your nursing, Marcella!"

into the blue field, all the history she had ever learned came back in review, and she began to realize how many struggles and heartaches and tears it took to make the flag what it really stands for to-day. She was beginning to get a world grasp on life.

It was just dusk when the last star was set, and she flung the bright folds of the flag from her upper window. The mother, hovering timorously be-

hind the parlor curtain, looked up, half proud, half fearful. It seemed presumptuous for quiet, simple people with little means to flaunt a handsome banner like that.

It was the night for Frederick to return if he were coming. Marcella, in her heart, had given him this one hour of grace, and presently he came walking down the street—but on the other side and with another girl!

The girl was Cornelia Porter, fluttering along in her usual affected way. So this was his revenge! Well, he had his answer in her ultimatum, flung forth in red and white and blue. Marcella thought she saw him start as he looked furtively over toward the house and saw the flag. He did not pause, but walked up the street and did not return. She knew now what she had to expect from him. He knew what he had to expect from her!

Marcella flung herself on her knees beside the bed with a great gasp and buried her face in the pillow, her whole body shaking with soundless sobs. She knew now that there was no turning to this road down which she had started. The moment was made no easier by the thought of her mother, cowering at the window below. To her this would spell but one word—calamity!

It seemed incredible that the sun should rise bright the next morning and the air take on that elixir of spring that stirs all the latent joy in the soul. Spring was going on in spite of war and lost love! The trees were putting on soft fringes of green. The munitions plant would presently be shut from sight by a wall of living green. Marcella, at her window, looked over hungrily toward the great acre of buildings which sheltered a host of workers who were akin to her in soul. She thirsted to be at work at something worth while.

Suddenly, as she looked, a great column of flame shot up into the air, with smoke and a soft, dull *plung!* *PLUNG!*—three separate explosions shaking the foundations of the earth, rattling the window by which she stood, rumbling away into the depths of the earth. Instantly a medley of confused cries arose, a din of whistles and fire alarms.

Marcella stood stunned, stupefied, at the sight. She put her hands to her ears and shuddered. It was the open-

ing of war! She understood as well as if it had been written across the morning sky in letters of fire, "An enemy hath done this!"

There were great flakes of cinders in the air. One could not see the munitions plant now for the smoke. The very sun seemed darkened. The fire engine went thundering down the street, and people ran out from their houses in every direction.

Mrs. Kemper opened the bedroom door fearfully.

"You don't suppose that's a submarine come up the river, do you, Marcie?"

The sight of her mother's distraught face brought the girl to her senses.

"No, mother. There's been a big explosion at the munitions plant. Some of the buildings are on fire. Look! You can see it from the window! I'm going to run down and find out if anybody was hurt!"

"Oh, don't, Marcella! You can't be sure but what it was a bomb dropped from an aeroplane! There might be more! There was a woman killed over in London——"

But Marcella was gone, running bareheaded down the street.

Some one called to her from a car that slowed up beside the pavement. It was Dudley Ward.

"Get in, Marcella," he said gravely, as if he had seen her but yesterday. "You'll be needed. There were three or four hundred girls in that building and more than half of them are horribly burned—many dead. There'll be need of all who can help!"

Marcella climbed in with relief. It was good to hear Dudley's voice again, to be going with him on a service of mercy.

War! If she had been suddenly conscripted and flung into the trenches, she could not have seen more horrible sights than she saw that morning as she toiled with the army of volunteers

to save lives and alleviate suffering. Shoulder to shoulder with the young doctor she worked, obeying his orders to the letter; doing things she had never dreamed it would be possible for her to do; seeing and hearing enough to make the stoutest heart quail, the strongest nerves give way. White to the lips, yet strong and clear-headed, she moved among the dead and dying; tearing bandages; holding a disfigured head while the doctor prepared some soothing lotion for the lacerated flesh; hiding away dismembered bodies under decent coverings; receiving last words from the tortured lips of the dying.

It was long past noon when she returned in the doctor's car, and then it was to announce to her mother that they were bringing three of the victims there to the house to be cared for. The hospitals were crowded and private houses were being pressed into requisition.

Mrs. Kemper stood dazed, with silent protest in her eyes, as her daughter flew about putting the parlor in order to receive a cot.

"What will we do without the parlor?" she whimpered. "What if Frederick comes?"

"Frederick!" Marcella echoed the name as of one she had known long ago and almost forgotten. "Oh, *Frederick!*" and she laughed as if he were a child who was not to be taken into account. "Mother, will you see if that is Dudley with the ambulance? I must have this bed made up before he gets here."

The mother turned to look out of the window. She felt as if she had just picked up what used to be her child's most cherished possession and the child had suddenly scorned it. She was dazed and burdened. It all depended upon her to keep up Marcella's loyalty to Frederick, yet what could she do? Dudley Ward's face, streaked with soot and perspiration, as he helped

to bring in his patient, was strangely unpleasant to her. She had never thought him a handsome child. He had not improved in her eyes now that he was a man. She had meant to protest against this invasion of her home as she had used to protest when he and Marcella had tracked mud on her clean kitchen floor. But when he came forward at the head of the stretcher, there was so much strength and power and gravity in his face that she only stood aside with a shudder from the poor creature on the cot. She could only wonder what they would do with such a state of things if Frederick should come back.

When Frederick did come back, several days later, it was Marcella who met him at the front door, coming with anxious, hurried step. One of the patients had had a bad turn and seemed to be dying. Marcella had not thought of Frederick for several days. Even now, she stepped back startled, with an anxious glance beyond him.

"Oh, it's you!" she said, disappointed. "I thought it was Dudley! Excuse me, but there's a woman in there dying, and I must get the doctor!"

Frederick stood in offended astonishment and watched her speeding across the street. Dudley! Why should she have thought he was Dudley? He turned with dignity and pushed open the parlor door, but an odor of disinfectants swept out in his amazed face and he caught a glimpse of a mummy-like figure swathed in bandages with Mrs. Kemper bending anxiously above it, and drew back bewildered as if he had somehow suddenly found himself in the wrong house. He beat a hasty retreat to the dining room, as he saw Marcella returning with the doctor. Oh, yes, Dudley was a doctor. He had forgotten.

It was an hour before Marcella came to him, an hour during which he had

passed through several different stages of emotion—annoyance, bewilderment, chagrin, indignation. Many people he knew were nursing victims of the munitions disaster, but why should Marcella have cumbered herself with such burdens?

Marcella's manner was absorbed, anxious, withdrawn. She did not apologize for her long delay. She said she had but a moment to stay.

Frederick arose with an impatient movement.

"I called to see if you had changed your mind and were ready to be married next week, but as you seem to be so occupied, I would better go away again."

Marcella looked at him pitifully from the height upon which the experiences of the past week had placed her, and answered him gently, as one does a little child whom one must hurt:

"No, Frederick, I haven't changed my mind. I couldn't marry you next week—or *ever!*"

"Then you never loved me!" There was startled astonishment in his tone.

"I loved what I thought was you," she said thoughtfully.

"And you don't any more?"

"I couldn't," she said earnestly. "Things have all changed. I've seen life from a different angle. I've discovered that you and I are not the only people in the universe. There's something bigger than just pleasing ourselves."

"Something bigger than love?" demanded Frederick loftily.

"Yes," said Marcella steadily, "to be able to give up that love, if need be, that the world may have more of it!"

"Bosh!" declared Frederick angrily. "Sentimental twaddle! Bosh!" and he took his hat and strode angrily from the room.

Mrs. Kemper stood by the front window looking drearily out into the darkening street after the tall, angry form

of the departing Frederick. Dudley Ward came across the street and passed her like a shadow, slipping silently into the room, but she did not see him. She was watching Marcella's last chance in life pass slowly out of sight.

The young doctor came to the cot and stood beside Marcella, bending to listen to the patient's breathing, touching the pulse with practiced finger. Then he looked up at the girl with a light of triumph in his eyes.

"She's going to get well," he said in a low, joyous voice, "and it is all due to your nursing, Marcella! She'll go back to her three little children, and she won't be scarred, either, thanks to you!"

Dudley Ward's voice was like a sweet, deep-toned bell whose music lingered in Marcella's heart. She was uplifted by a great ecstasy. She had entirely forgotten Frederick. It was enough that she could live, and save life, and receive Dudley Ward's commendation.

The happy days of service passed. The patients, one by one, recovered till all were gone at last and the little parlor restored to its old order. Marcella, suddenly bereft of her duties, stood again at the window looking out on the sunset battlements of cloud against a blazing sky, and faced her future. War was still in the air. Men in khaki or marine blue walked everywhere. There was talk of sending a regiment to France. Dudley Ward was expecting his call to duty any day. His comradeship had been a wonderful thing as they had worked together. It had been almost like being a soldier in service to work with him. What was life going to be now that the work was over and he was gone? Who was to take his place in her life? Frederick? She almost laughed at the thought. No, never Frederick any more. How had she ever thought it could be? But life was going to be very dull and



And he wanted to take care of her mother, too! How wonderful! Poor little mother!
So long the burdens had rested upon her inadequate shoulders.

empty without Dudley. This was the first night he had not come over at the evening hour, but of course there was no reason, now the patients were gone——

"Marcella!"

He was there, standing beside her in the shadow. His arm was about her, drawing her into the shelter of the curtain.

"I've got my commission, Marcella! I go to-morrow night! But I can't go without telling you I love you. I've tried, for it didn't seem fair to cumber your life with a man who might get shot any day. But I can't go without speaking. I've loved you, Marcella, since we were kids in school, and these last weeks together have been

the greatest in my life! I was afraid, from what folks said, that some other fellow might have got ahead of me, and I can't go off to war without finding out. Marcella, am I too late? Do you belong to some one else?"

Marcella put out her hands with a beautiful motion of surrender and her voice caught in a quick sob.

"Oh, no! You're not too late!" she said joyously, "I was almost a fool, but the war brought me to my senses! How could I ever have thought that I cared for any one else when there was you in the world!" and her head went home to his shoulder like a bird to its nest.

An hour later, Mrs. Kemper opened the door a nervous crack and peered into the shadowy room to see what her

strange child was doing all alone in the darkness. Marcella's voice vibrated to greet her:

"Mother, Dudley and I are going to be married in the morning just as soon as he can get the license. Mother, won't you be glad with me? I'm very happy!"

Mrs. Kemper stood in the doorway, nervously gripping her hands together.

"Why, Marcella!" she protested tearfully. "Why, *Marcella!* What if Frederick should come back!"

Marcella laughed out joyously.

"Oh, mother dear! It won't make any difference if Frederick comes back. I've found somebody bigger and better than Frederick. I've found a real man!"

"You see—mother," said Dudley Ward, laying a shy hand on the mother's arm, "I'm going to war to-morrow, and I want to make sure you and Marcella are perfectly safe. I want the right to take care of you both in case of war coming to this country, or in case of anything happening to me. My

uncle left me a little money, and I want it in Marcella's hands, so she can use it in case of trouble. It will save complications if we are married before I go. I shall feel happier to go that way, you know."

Mrs. Kemper sat down suddenly in the nearest chair and tears of relief slipped slowly down her cheeks. Then Marcella hadn't lost all her chances, after all! And he wanted to take care of her mother, too! How wonderful! Poor little mother! So long the burdens of life for herself and her child had rested upon her inadequate shoulders!

She laid her frail little frightened hands on their two heads as they knelt beside her and gave each a trembling kiss. Then she slipped away in the dusk and left them to each other.

Upstairs in Marcella's window, she stood and looked down on the big, bright flag waving below. For the first time since Marcella had put it there, she felt a sense of protection and shelter in its presence.



THE LIVING

THE room is full of the dead;
They are talking and drinking tea,
Talking as they are fed,
Politely, carefully.

There are chocolates to pass,
And small round cakes to eat;
There are names of newcomers
To listen to and repeat.

They are only saying words;
They do not feel or think.
They only want to be seen,
Or a bit more tea to drink.

And he lies cold in a grave,
And in all this take and give
Of talk, he and I in the room
Are the only ones that live.

MARY CAROLYN DAVIES.



THE MIRACLE BY F. RONEY WEIR

Author of

"The Cuckoo's Nest," "Floretta of
the Garden," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY
LOVRIEN PRICE

**The delightful story of a small
boy and a smooth white board.**

HENRY BAKER felt a just resentment at his neighbor, Tolby Marsh, for renting the little house to a widow with a boy. He was sure that Tolby had made that bargain with malice intent. Tolby knew what widows were up to who rented little houses next to widowers who lived in big ones. Oh, Tolby Marsh knew well enough, and had laughed in his sleeve and set the trap!

Once, long ago when he had been very young, Henry Baker had married a widow—with a boy—and had found life hard indeed. The five years since his wife's taking-off had been years of comparative tranquillity. Tolby Marsh knew this, and, like the old hyena that he was, he had planned to destroy that tranquillity. He knew well enough that Henry did not care for widows and despised boys. Henry hoped that the boy would steal Tolby's melons, stone his cat, and frighten his children on their way home from school. It would serve him right.

Not being a widower, Tolby Marsh was safe personally from the machinations of the new neighbor. Henry had only caught a glimpse of the widow once as she carried some of her meager furniture into the hut. (That little

house of Tolby Marsh's was nothing more. It had a garden the size of a pocket handkerchief, and a little tumble-down shed on the alley, a sort of aggravated dog house—just the place for boys to congregate and hatch mischief, as Tolby Marsh must have known.) He had seen that she was slight, with yellow hair, and therefore a person to be avoided.

The minute the boy put in an appearance, Henry knew that he belonged to the widow. He, too, had tow-colored hair and was persistent about getting what he wanted. In this case, it happened to be a smooth white board which had stood outside of Henry's carpenter shop for a half hour the day before, while he had made a place for it inside. That was when the boy had happened to see it.

The boy fairly devoured the board with his eyes before he asked Mr. Baker what he considered it worth. Henry put an exorbitant price on it. He didn't care to sell it, and he didn't want the boy hanging round. He said the board—to him—was worth a dollar. And the boy went away.

After he had gone, Henry got to thinking about that crestfallen look. He wondered what the boy wanted of the

board. For the life of him, he could not shut out the sight of that disappointed face. There it was, bothering, haunting him—bobbing up between him and his work on Mr. Stanley's window casings. The Stanley house would be the biggest house in town, and Henry was proud of being its builder and designer. He was making a good thing out of the contract, too.

Plague on it! He wished Tolby Marsh had been in Terra del Fuego before he had rented the little house to a widow with a boy! He had done it to be mean—that was all!

The day Henry put the facings on the mantel in the parlor of the Stanley house, he saw the boy again, trudging toward the little house, carrying a heavy bag of something—potatoes, presumably. He had a mind to call to him and tell him he might have the board for fifty cents. Then he remembered a trait of his stepson's—a successful young business man now—and he went home and carried the board out of his shop and set it against the side of the building in plain sight. If the boy really wanted the board, he would come and steal it. Then Henry would have good reason for hating him and could go on with his work at the Stanley house and not worry over the disappointment in a little round face under a shock of white hair.

But the boy did not steal the board. It stood there against the side of the shop like a ghost until the colored woman who kept house and cooked for Henry asked if she might cut it up for kindling wood.

"Certainly not!" he replied with vigor. "You let that board strictly alone. I ask a dollar for that board."

"It's a-wau'pin'!" snapped Lucindy, and went into the house and banged the kitchen door behind her.

Henry examined the board and found that Lucindy's diagnosis was correct. That night he went out of

his way to interview the boy; in fact, he had to run for it, really. The weather had turned into the regular December brand, and there were snowflakes in the air. The boy wore a little thin jacket, and his hands and his little nose were blue with the cold; and his little stub-toed shoes were hitting the sidewalk at a great rate in order to keep his blood in circulation.

"Hey!" called Henry Baker, racing after him. "Are you Mrs. Jetty's boy—the boy who wanted to buy that board of mine?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you want it yet?"

"No, sir."

"Oh—all right, then. Er—did—did you find some other board that suited you better?"

"No, sir."

"Do you still think that you could use my board?"

"Yes, sir, but—I ain't got a dollar."

"Oh. Well—say—had you heard? Boards are 'way down!" A look of dazzling hope overspread the face of the boy.

"How much is it now?" he gasped, hoping against hope.

"How much you got?"

"A quarter."

"Well, that's just the price of the board—now."

The boy gave a skip. His eyes fairly popped with excitement.

"I'll come after it to-night," he breathed. "I'll bring my money!" He was on the wing again, just touching the high spots as he sped homeward.

It was dusk before he came after the board. The quarter which he laid in Henry's palm was quite warm from being held so closely.

"What are you going to do with the board?" asked Henry.

The boy grinned and hung his head and would not answer. Henry helped him get it over the fence into the yard of the little house.

"I'll make a bargain with you," conceded Henry. "I'll give you the board—give the quarter back, you know—if you'll tell me what you intend to do with it."

But the boy would not tell.

"He's up to some mischief with that board," Henry decided, as he went in to partake of Lucindy's poorly cooked supper. But what could it be? What could a kid do with a board that was so very bad? If it were not for gratifying Tolby Marsh, he would have stepped over and made the acquaintance of the widow and inquired into her son's activities.

Twice, as he walked through the lane, he heard the rasp of a saw in the little building that stood flush with the alley. Henry's curiosity became a veritable pain to him. Here he was under contract to complete the Stanley house before Christmas, with finishers and light men and floor waxers on his mind, and all he could think of was a chubby-faced boy sawing away in Mrs. Jetty's shed. A plague take such a man as Tolby Marsh for renting to folks with boys! Boys always pestered the life out of neighbors, and Tolby Marsh knew it!

Every night, now, between the hours of four and six, Henry heard sounds of activity in the Jetty shed. Mrs. Jetty came home from her work at six, always, and after that the sounds ceased.

Saturday afternoon a very tired, discouraged-looking little boy came out of the Jetty shed and stood sagging in the path a few minutes before he went into the house. Henry waited until he felt sure that the Jetty's were at their evening meal; then he vaulted the low fence, entered the Jetty shed, and carefully flashed his pocket light.

He had trespassed on his neighbor's place to find out what the Jetty boy was making, but he stood in doubt even with the object before his eyes.

It was too high for a chair and too low for a table; it had a game leg, and the rickets in one shoulder. It was a pitiable object, and Henry Baker's heart ached for the boy who had tried so hard and failed so utterly, and for the Widow Jetty, who would be obliged to accept and cherish the distorted thing or hurt her boy's feelings.

He fairly shivered in his shoes at the sound of Mrs. Jetty's voice at the back door talking to her boy. Suppose she should come and discover him there, hiding in her shed—he, Mr. Henry Baker, builder and designer of the largest house in town! Such a silly trick for a self-respecting man to do—to come sneaking into a shed that didn't belong to him!

But the Jetty's were just at the back door after kindling wood for their morning fire. They kept it in a dry-goods box, where it was nice and handy. The woman had a sweet, girlish voice.

After they were safely in the house again, Henry came out of the shed and climbed the fence into his own yard. He had considerable trouble getting over, for he carried the "object" with him.

He took it into his own shop, where there were real tools—planes and bits and try-squares and a miter box. His lamp burned until after twelve o'clock, and Lucindy decided that "Mistah Stanley was a-hurryin' the boss right sma't 'bout wuk."

When, in the small hours, Henry carried the "object" back to the Jetty shed, it was still too low for a table and too high for a chair; but its four legs were symmetrical and all of a length, its top neatly and skillfully fitted together, its edges even and smooth.

And Henry Baker felt like a fool all the next day. He was not used to late hours; they made his head ache, and when his head ached, he was apt to be impatient with his men. What a nuisance!



In trying to be careful of the table, he caught his foot on the top of the fence and fell headlong, coming down on all fours in the frozen garden.

sance it was—Tolby putting such a renter into the little house!

For six consecutive nights Henry Baker crawled over that back fence, abducted the "object," and repaired the damage done by unskilled labor during the day. He tried to make the improvements gradually, so that the boy might think he was making the table himself. But of course this was impos-

sible. Any boy who was not half-witted would have realized that some outside hand was tinkering with his job. He expected every day that the boy would come to his shop and ask about the matter.

Through all the time of finishing the Stanley house, there were not fifteen uninterrupted minutes when Henry Baker's mind was wholly and undivid-

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edly upon the work in hand. It was outrageous! He was either thinking about the boy or the table or the sweet voice of the boy's mother.

Christmas Eve he carried the table home for the last time. It was really a table now. He had added daintily turned bulbous additions to the bottoms of the legs, thus bringing it to the proper table height. It was sand-papered and stained and filled and waxed to a pleasing, satiny condition, and Henry felt that, really, he would not have been ashamed of it in his own front hall, pine though it was.

But this was the night when he had had luck. The moonlight was very bright, almost like sunlight. Somehow, in trying to be extra careful of the table, he caught his foot on the top of the fence and fell headlong, coming down with a loud "Whoosh!" on all fours in the frozen garden. The table pirouetted an instant, then stood calmly upright above its less fortunate maker.

Henry knew that his mishap had not been noiseless, and just during the time after he left the top of the fence and before he plowed into the dead grass with his hands, he determined to leave his burden standing where it had struck and make a quick sprint for home—so swiftly does the human mind act under stress. But when he regained his feet, he changed his plans again, for there stood Mrs. Jetty, in a fluttering white garment, bed slippers on her feet and a big shawl wrapped about her.

"What are you doing in my yard?" she demanded in a frightened voice. She was shaking with cold and terror—he could see that plainly—and he was ready to die with mortification.

"I—hope you'll excuse me," he faltered. "My name is Henry Baker, and I live next door——"

"But what are you doing in my yard at this time of night?" she demanded again, although in a voice that was sweet even under such conditions.

"I am—not at liberty to tell," mumbled Henry, wishing in his heart that he might sell out and go to live somewhere a thousand miles from that plagued old Tolby Marsh who had brought all this trouble upon him—and take the Widow Jetty and her boy along!

The widow pointed to the table, standing there so nice and trim in the frozen garden.

"What is that?" she questioned.

"Th—that?" said Henry, gazing blankly at the table.

"It looks like a little table," said Mrs. Jetty.

"It does, doesn't it?" remarked Henry cheerfully. "It really does—now. It didn't, though, the first time I saw it."

"But who brought it here?"

"Santa Claus must have dropped it as he flew over," suggested Henry, rubbing the knee which had come in contact with a particularly pointed clod of frozen earth.

"If you brought that table here, you must take it right away again," said the widow severely. "Why should you bring a table here? Did you make it?"

"No, Mrs. Jetty, your son made it. I merely——"

"My son?" cried Mrs. Jetty, with her voice all one trembling flood of love, like the voice of an angel. She ran to the table and spread her little hands over the satiny top, as reverently as if it were a marquetry table inlaid with ivory and rare woods.

"And he left it with you until Christmas, and you were bringing it when you fell over the fence and frightened me so?"

"Well—not exactly, Mrs. Jetty. But in the main you have the facts."

"And I wasn't nice to you, was I? Oh, I do hope you will forgive me! But, you see, you frightened me so!"

She gave Henry a cold hand, and Henry went all of a shake as he shook.

"Forgive you, Mrs. Jetty?" he quavered. "It's for you to forgive me, if you ever can. Great mutt that I am—tumbling over your fence and scaring the very liver out of you!"

But Mrs. Jetty had gone back to the table again.

"And to think that Benny made it all by himself! Isn't it just wonderful? Don't you think it is just wonderful that a boy could make a table like that all alone?"

"It is—wonderful!" owned Henry. "It—looks more perfect in the moonlight, of course. When you come to see it in daylight, you will probably notice flaws in construction——"

"Under any light, it will always be perfectly beautiful to me!"

"Thanks—— I mean—Benny will be so pleased. Now I'll just chuck it into your shed, here, and you'd better run in, or you'll catch your death of cold."

"Thank you, Mr.——"

"Baker."

"Baker. You are real good. This is what Benny has been worrying about, I'll warrant you, ever since he's been laid up——"

"Laid up! Is Benny laid up?"

"Hadh't you heard? He got run over by one of those men who never drive an automobile faster than five miles an hour. His poor little right leg is broken——"

"May I call to see Benny, Mrs. Jetty?"

"I should be pleased to have you."

"Thank you. I'll drop in—again—to-morrow morning. Benny will remember. He bought the lumber of me to make the table of."

Who gave a hang for Tolby Marsh, anyhow!

Henry Baker went home with his pulses thumping. If there was nothing to hinder—no previous engagement on the widow's part or anything horrible like that—Tolby Marsh would have a

house to rent again before many months, and he, Henry Baker, would have a legal right to make tables enough for Mrs. Jetty to cover an eighty-acre field, and he would do it, too!

When Henry called, Christmas morning, he found Benny in splints and bandages, but with a hopeful, devoted look in his eyes. He whispered to Mr. Baker and asked him if he would be willing to go to the barn and bring in the Christmas present he had been making there for his mother.

Henry went and brought it in, and Mrs. Jetty exclaimed over it as if she had never seen it before. Benny stared at it with a sort of religious awe. He made her lift it and bring it up close.

"Yes," he murmured, "it's finished!" He examined the bulbous additions to the legs, passing a reverent hand over them.

"And you remembered that mother wished for a little table, and you worked out in that old shed and made it for mother all alone!" breathed Mrs. Jetty, hugging her child with the hug of an angel. (Little, tiny, weak, worn thing to be working so hard to support herself and her boy! It would just be fun to make things for her and to buy things for her and for Benny. Hang Tolby Marsh! Who cared?)

"No, mother, I didn't make it all alone," owned Benny soberly. "There was a while back at first when I was afraid it wasn't going to be fit to be seen, and I had spent all my money for the board, so I couldn't buy you anything else. Then—I was helped. Somebody helped me, mother. Somebody rubbed over my mistakes and smoothed out the rough spots."

"Who?" asked Mrs. Jetty faintly.

"Why, one that I love and that you love, mother." Mrs. Jetty's face turned scarlet, and Henry Baker drew in such a strong breath through his nostrils that it made a noise like a steam engine. "It was God," said Benny reverently.

The Lonely Bachelor's Christmas

By Royal Brown

Author of "The Minor Details," "Dynamite and Sudden Death," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY FREDERICK B. TURTON

We doubt if Bigsby will ever again leave his "lonesome old apartment" to share the Christmas joys of any happy family. A bitterly humorous tale.

LANGDON BIGSBY was the bachelor. Bigsby lived in bachelor apartments with an open fireplace, a shower bath, and all-night elevator service. His household gods were a judiciously stocked cellaret and a curiously wrought ebony humidior that compelled admiration and excited wonder as it reached down into its vitals and produced a cigarette.

Also, Bigsby belonged to a club, carried a cane, wore glasses from which a black ribbon flowed back over his right ear, attended first nights, and sent flowers to past and prospective hostesses.

Than this no bachelor can have or do more.

Envious males had been known to gibe at his obviously careful grooming. Acrid females were wont to criticize his aura of self-sufficiency. It remained for Molly Martin to discover that he was lonely—or, rather, that he would be lonely on Christmas. Even, Bigsby never suspected it.

The spirit of Christmas—which is always doing such things—was responsible for Molly's inspiration. She was happy and she wanted everybody else to be. The portal to her heart was not steel-ribbed and time-locked, like old Scrooge's; it was a revolving door, which always swung on ball bearings. At Christmas time, kindly inspirations kept it whirring.

Robert Martin might have opposed

Molly's inspiration more vigorously had he not learned that her idea of her part of the marriage pact was to love him when he deserved to be loved, to honor him when she conscientiously could, and to obey naught but her own sweet will.

"Perhaps he has some other engagement," he objected weakly.

"I don't believe he has," retorted Molly vigorously. "Anyway, we can ask him to come. I wouldn't be happy Christmas if I thought that poor Mr. Bigsby was lonesome in that old apartment of his just because we were too selfish to share our happiness with him."

That settled it as far as Robert was concerned. He knew that if Molly said she wouldn't be happy, she would do her best to keep her promise. The next day he broke the news to poor Mr. Bigsby.

If Robert had been less maladroit, Bigsby might have evaded Molly's invitation. But when Robert asked him how he intended to spend Christmas, Bigsby, regarding it as a casual question, replied—as bachelors are supposed to—that he would spend it envying luckier men who have wives and families and such things.

The next thing Bigsby knew he was scheduled to appear at the Martin home not later than six-thirty Christmas Eve. It quite took his breath away. Had he been less artistic in his description of



The two young Martins, still engaged in internecine warfare, failed to note the disaster they had wrought. "Give it to me! Give it to me!" they shouted in unison.

a bachelor's loveless state—on Christmas—Bigsby might have extricated himself even then. As it was, he was caught. Bigsby prided himself on keeping his engagements. He never had disappointed a prospective hostess and never would, health and wardrobe permitting.

At least—so he reflected—the Martins were not poverty-stricken. He could be assured of creature comforts.

This was less materialistic on Bigsby's part than it appears. Bigsby was fair-haired; he was both fascinated and repelled by advertisements of masculine corsets; and he was at the age when he expected every hair to do its duty, as was necessary if a growing cause for concern were to be kept from

premature disclosure. He made the most of himself, did Bigsby, presenting a well-tailored front to the world and hoping it resembled a straight front. And he needed all the assistance creature comforts could give.

The clock on the holly-wreathed mantel in the Martins' living room had just struck the half hour after six when Bigsby pressed the button beside the front door. As he waited for the maid to appear, he drew himself up, inflated his chest, and made an honest effort to deflate its environs. One of the most impressive things about Bigsby was his manner of entering. He patterned it after that of

John Drew.

"That must be Bigsby," commented Robert, who was with Molly and the children in the living room. Then he added hastily, "Junior! Sally! Come back!"

Junior was six and Sally was five. At the moment, they were elbowing each other as they raced for the front door. To Robert's command they paid no attention. They were well aware that the spirit of Christmas was abroad and that they might, for the moment, cast aside the inhibitions that usually preserved diplomatic relations between them and their father.

At the front door, there was a terrific struggle for the possession of the knob. Though smaller and rounder

than her brother, Sally had her mother's spirit. She did not relinquish her efforts until her unchivalrous adversary had exhausted his repertoire of assault, and then she managed to place herself in the vanguard by executing a flank movement.

Junior, thwarted at the instant when victory had seemed his, gave her a shove, which catapulted her against the door. It opened outward with a celerity that took Bigsby by surprise, striking him on what might be called the easternmost point of his anatomy. It had once been his waistline.

"Woof!" ejaculated Bigsby, departing from the manner of John Drew. At the same instant his silk hat slid forward, displacing his eyeglasses and coasting down the bridge of his nose.

The two young Martins, still engaged in internecine warfare, failed to note the disaster they had wrought.

"Give it to me! Give it to me!" they shouted in unison.

When Robert and Molly arrived on the scene, Bigsby was vainly endeavoring to free himself and retrieve his hat.

"Merry Christmas!" caroled Molly, reaching out and hauling Sally forth by the skirt. "I'm afraid the children mistook you for an expressman. They've been racing to the door all day," she added with an apologetic smile.

"Come in," added Robert, tightening his grip on Junior's collar. "Glad you've come."

Bigsby adjusted his glasses, and stumbled over the threshold.

"I'm glad to be here," he replied politely, but untruthfully.

The children realized their mistake and retreated, leaving their parents to do the honors.

"Come into the living room," invited Molly, "and do excuse the confusion."

Bigsby advanced. He became conscious that a meager, sharp-featured woman, who sat stiffly in her chair, was

examining him through steel-rimmed spectacles.

"This," explained Molly, "is Robert's Aunt Sarah. Miss Nyal—Mr. Bigsby."

Aunt Sarah's stiff acknowledgment was accompanied by no relaxation of her features. Robert had been explaining about Bigsby. He had told Aunt Sarah that Bigsby was a bachelor; that he lived in bachelor apartments; that he—

But at this point Bigsby had arrived, cutting off further details. Aunt Sarah needed none. She had read about bachelors and bachelor apartments. She regarded Bigsby as a lost soul with a silver flask in its hip pocket.

"I am very glad to meet you, Miss Nyal," said Bigsby, in his very best manner.

"Hmph!" said Aunt Sarah.

She was no hypocrite. She wasn't glad to meet Bigsby and she wasn't going to say she was. Instead, she sat down, with an access of rigidity. She meant to signify, by her attitude, that her mind was made up and that she had no intention of changing it.

The Martins' living room was furnished with an eye to comfort, rather than pretension. The chairs were roomy and inviting; the lights were low and softly diffused. In the big fireplace, blazing logs added to an atmosphere of cheer and well-being. But Bigsby was neither comfortable nor cheerful. The round-eyed interest with which Junior and Sally, who had retreated to their mother's side, regarded him, made him feel, somehow, as if he were on exhibition.

Only Ann, the youngest of the Martin children, ignored him. She sat in the middle of the floor, reading to herself from a book held upside down.

"And he went along," she droned. "And—he—went — along—and—he—went—along—and he fell down and—he—said, 'Why, my dear!'" she concluded triumphantly.

Molly shot a proud glance at Bigsby. Then she turned to Ann.

"Say 'Little Bo-Peep' for Mr. Bigsby, Ann," she cajoled.

"Won't," said Ann, without raising her eyes.

Aunt Sarah's eyes shone with cold triumph.

"It's wonderful," she observed, "the way children take naturally to some people and won't have no part of others. They say dogs and children see the soul."

Bigsby's jaw sagged. It was his first encounter with the type of New England spinster who takes pride in the fact that she speaks her mind. There was an awkward silence before Molly gathered her wits and came to the rescue.

"Bedtime, children," she announced. "Say good night to Mr. Bigsby."

Junior and Sally shot furtive glances at Bigsby and said nothing. Molly, with an access of color, repeated her command. Sally hung her head and squirmed, but Junior, catching his father's eye, muttered:

"Good-ni, Mr. Bigsby."

Then, having done his duty, he started warily for the door. Before he reached that avenue of escape, he stopped and examined Bigsby with sudden and unaccountable interest.

"Can you wiggle your ears?" he asked.

"Junior!" exclaimed Robert and Molly simultaneously.

"Well, Uncle Bill can," defended Junior. "He can wiggle his ears and play 'Yankee Doodle' on his teeth with a pencil."

Junior continued to look hopefully at Bigsby. The latter, conscious of his lack of distinction, could think of nothing to say. Molly again saved the situation by capturing her son and herding him through the door.

"Children say awfully funny things,"

apologized Robert. "You can never tell what's working in their minds."

As if in confirmation, Sally's shrill soprano floated back to the living room.

"Is Mr. Bigsby a puffed' gentleman, mamma?"

"Shh, Sally!" came Molly's whisper, surprisingly distinct.

"But is he?" persisted Sally.

"Of course!"

"I thought so," affirmed Sally. There was a momentary silence. Then: "If Santa Claus brought papa a tall hat and a cane, would he be a puffed' gentleman, too?"

Evidently this struck a chord in Junior's consciousness, for his excited accents came over the stairs:

"There was a man in a picture on a fence and he had a lady by the neck and he was choking her. He had a tall hat just like Mr. Bigsby, only he wasn't fat like him——"

Bigsby's face went two shades pinker. Robert, clutching for a conversational straw, hurriedly broke in with:

"Can I make you a cocktail—or do you prefer to mix your own?"

Bigsby brightened.

"Why, if you care to let me, perhaps I can introduce you to something new," he began.

Aunt Sarah sprang to her feet.

"Cocktails," she exploded, "are the invention of the devil! I never expected I should hear such things mentioned in my nephew's house!"

For a moment she glared at Bigsby through her spectacles. He all but cringed. Then she sailed majestically from the room.

Robert smiled wryly.

"I'd forgotten Aunt Sarah's feelings on the subject," he explained. "She came unexpectedly to-day—the first visit she's paid us since we were married. She's rather eccentric. Perhaps, if you don't mind——"

"Oh, not at all," assented Bigsby

hastily, with an apprehensive glance toward the door through which Aunt Sarah had departed.

Conversation was desultory for several moments. It had all but collapsed when Molly's voice trilled down from above.

"Wouldn't you like to hear Sally say her prayers, Mr. Bigsby?"

Bigsby rose.

"Delighted!" he exclaimed, and began ascending the stairs with descending spirits.

Sally lay in her bed in the blue-and-white nursery. She regarded Bigsby with dispassionate eyes.

"I'll leave you alone with her," said Molly sprightly. "Now say them prettily, Sally."

Sally began slowly, still keeping her round eyes on Bigsby's face.

"And bless mother and father and Junior and Ann and all my kind friends. Amen," she finished. With a quickening note in her voice she added: "What does 'God bless' mean?"

Bigsby squirmed uneasily.

"Why, it—er—means take care of them and give them what they want!"

Sally considered this.

"Would God give me a washbasin?" she asked.

Bigsby gasped. But before he could frame an answer, Sally added pessimistically:

"I don't believe He would. One night, after I 'God-blessed' everybody in this house, mamma had a cold the very next day."

There was a silence, during which Bigsby, confronted by Sally's unblinking stare, experienced the sensations of a fly transfixed by a pin.

"Why wouldn't I get any Christmas presents if I didn't let you hear my prayers?" she asked finally.

The only thing that saved Bigsby from utter rout was Molly's reappearance.

She smiled graciously at her guest

and her daughter, adding, for the benefit of the former, that dinner was served.

The Martins had but one maid and made no pretense of service, but the various courses were splendidly cooked. Bigsby, though he missed the warming influence of his cocktail and felt the chill of Aunt Sarah's disapproval, began to feel better. He turned to his hostess and complimented her in his archest, most gallant manner.

"A man who lives in restaurants and cafays ought to appreciate good home cooking," commented Aunt Sarah.

After that, conversation languished. When dinner was finished, came the filling of the children's stockings, the ceremony which Molly had felt that Bigsby would enjoy above all others. But Bigsby sat apart and said nothing. He dared not speak.

Aunt Sarah, also, sat apart, watching the process. She, too, was silent, until Molly, flushed with happiness, exhibited the watch, chain, and knife that were to go in the toe of Junior's stocking.

"In my day," Aunt Sarah then declared, "we were glad to get an orange in the toe and a passel of nuts and raisins. If times were good and father'd had time to go to town, we might get a toy or a pair of mittens. Children are spoiled nowadays."

From the way she looked at him, Bigsby felt that somehow he was to blame for that toe.

After that the punctured Bigsby permitted himself to be towed away to the den, in one corner of which stood the Christmas tree. Under it most of the presents had already been assembled, and Molly and Robert, in foolish ecstasies of delight, began decking it with gorgeous silver balls, tinsel, and ornaments.

The evening that followed was the longest in Bigsby's experience. He thought, of his apartments, with the

cellaret and the humidior that performed so satisfactorily, until he actually became homesick. He had a cigarette case in his pocket, but he suspected that Aunt Sarah would look upon cigarettes as she had upon cock-tails. He was grateful when Aunt Sarah suggested that it was bedtime.

"I'm afraid," Molly said to Bigsby, "that you'll have to sleep here in the den. Aunt Sarah's got the guest room, but I'm sure you won't mind. The couch is really most comfortable."

"Of coursé I shan't mind," Bigsby reassured her. But his manner was wan. To Aunt Sarah's list of inventions of the devil, he would have cheerfully added all the "comfortable" couches he had ever intrusted his reluctant body to.

"We'll expect you to guard the presents," added Robert jovially.

"Yes," added Molly archly. "And I shall feel so much easier in my mind to think you are here. We've had several burglaries in the neighborhood lately."

"Rest assured, they'll be safe," said Bigsby, bowing with almost his usual gallantry.

"Hmph!" sniffed Aunt Sarah.

"Turn off the steam and open the windows as wide as you wish," said Robert. "Then, if a burglar comes in, you'll have no trouble in throwing him out again. Good night."

Left to himself, Bigsby sat down on the couch and surveyed his surroundings with morose eyes. Gradually it dawned on him that there was no obvious place to put the toilet perquisites from his bag. Though he would have fought any one who had said so with much more ferocity than he would have fought a burglar, he was somewhat old-maidish in his ways, and the lack of conveniences bothered him. He began to undress and discovered that there was no place to put his clothes, except over the backs of the chairs.

Eventually he was attired for repose. Then began the anxious scrutiny of the steam radiator. Which way did the steam turn off? Bigsby experimented and swore softly as a hissing jet of water struck his pajama legs. The place to turn it off was lower down, of course.

The couch was soft enough, but it was that stubborn softness which is characteristic of all couches and some women. Apparently submissive to Bigsby's slightest whim, it nevertheless resisted him, subtly and stealthily. Moreover, it seemed to have no affinity either with the blankets or the mattress, nor they with each other. The slightest strain parted them.

Bigsby lay on his back, absolutely wide awake. All through the house not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse. The only sound came from the steam radiator, which sounded like a package of anæmic firecrackers being exploded in a tin can. The room grew warmer and warmer; it became insufferably hot. Bigsby arose and sought to remonstrate with the radiator. On the way, he collided with some unclassified object, with which he conversed in a manner that would have at once shocked and pleased Aunt Sarah. Her worst suspicions would have been justified by what Bigsby said.

The radiator, after a few sulky murmurings, subsided, but the room remained tropical in atmosphere. It seemed impossible that it would ever be cool again. Bigsby recklessly threw off first one blanket and then another, until only one remained. After that he tossed and turned and twisted until, through sheer exhaustion, he fell asleep.

Some time later he awoke, conscious of an ache in his shoulder. He discovered that the comfortable couch had managed to capture one arm and place it under him in such a way that the unfortunate member had gone to sleep. Bigsby rescued it and lay awake.



The evening that followed was the longest in Bigsby's experience.

The room was still warm and very dark. Through the open window he could see the yellow light of a street lamp. The den was on the ground floor, facing the front lawn. Bigsby wondered if burglars worked the night before Christmas. If they did, here was a ripe opportunity. Usually unimaginative, he diverted himself now by picturing a burly form coming through the window.

Of course he knew what he would do.

"I say, old chap," he would say,

"travel right along. This room is already taken, you know."

Rather neat, that! The burglar—Bigsby had read that professional housebreakers never carried a revolver—would naturally scuttle away more quickly than he had come. And it would be a great story to tell at the breakfast table.

"I might have gotten the beggar, I suppose," Bigsby pictured himself as saying,—"but it was the night before Christmas, and when you come to think of it, I don't suppose they really want

to break in. Perhaps he has a starving wife——"

Bigsby's pleasing vision dissolved suddenly. Some one had opened the door, very softly and furtively.

"Who—who's that?" Bigsby thought. He tried to phrase the words, but his craven tongue rebelled.

He lay quite rigid, his mouth dry and his ears strained. Perhaps—the thought came to him suddenly—perhaps he wouldn't be at the breakfast table to tell about the burglar, after all. It's all well and good enough to say that professional burglars go unarmed, but suppose this particular burglar with whom Bigsby had to deal didn't belong to the Housebreakers' Union and observe its rules and regulations. Suppose this burglar was an amateur with a starving wife. He might not know any more than to carry a revolver and get rattled and shoot without thinking. He might miss—and again he mightn't.

The intruder had resumed his stealthy progress. Apparently he was feeling his way toward the couch. Bigsby struggled with a mad inclination to hide under the clothes. It would not be manly, one half of his shrinking person assured him—nor safe to stir, the other half shrieked.

The intruder collided with something and muttered a single word with great distinctness. Bigsby realized that the second occupant of the room was annoyed and that he mustn't provoke him further. Bigsby, too, wished the chair hadn't been there. It was just like these Martins to leave their chairs around carelessly where a burglar would bark his shins and get annoyed and vent his annoyance on innocent bystanders—or by-reposers—like Bigsby!

The muffled footfalls approached nearer. Bigsby's heart stood still. The intruder rested a hand on the couch. Bigsby's heart turned a double somersault. The intruder knelt down beside the couch. Bigsby's heart began to play

a piccolo solo on his ribs. He could almost feel the burglar's breath upon his cheek.

In that pregnant moment, Bigsby made one discovery and substantiated another. He was a coward and it was true that fright made a man's hair stand on end. His was quite erect. With a flash of self-revelation, Bigsby saw himself as he was—and that was no hero.

The midnight marauder might take the Christmas tree and presents; he might take Bigsby's watch and chain and wallet; he might even take a pot shot at Bigsby as he departed and hit him in some comparatively innocuous portion of the body, such as the right leg—Bigsby's right leg quivered apprehensively at this bit of treachery—but as long as he left Bigsby still drawing breath and sure to recover, he, Bigsby, would have a very Merry Christmas indeed.

One of the intruder's hands stirred only a foot away from Bigsby's twitching nose. He was apparently searching for something under the couch. Bigsby stood it until flesh and blood could stand no more.

"D—d—don't shoot!" he begged.

"Oh, I say, old man! I'm awfully sorry I woke you!" ejaculated the voice of his apologetic host.

Bigsby's relief was instant.

"Is that you?" he asked inanely.

"Yes," Robert reassured him, and added explanatorily, "I hid one of Molly's presents under the couch and I thought I could steal in and get it without wakening you."

"That's all right! That's all right!" babbled Bigsby.

"You see," continued Robert, "I wanted to hang up one of Molly's stockings as a surprise to her, but I forgot it was in here, and while waiting for her to fall asleep, I fell asleep myself." He stooped and secured the present.

"I say—you won't say anything about this to Molly?" he added.

"Oh, no!" agreed Bigsby. He was quite willing to let bygones be bygones. Indeed, his forgiveness was as measureless as his relief. At that moment he could have kissed Robert or embraced his knees.

Robert withdrew, and Bigsby lay awake an hour before falling asleep once more, to dream that he had started to wade through a river which began to freeze the moment he put his foot in the water. Halfway across, it had frozen solid, holding him a prisoner with his legs incased in solid ice to his knees.

When he awoke, it was to find that the blankets, definitely divorcing themselves from the mattress, had wrapped themselves lovingly around his knees, leaving his shins and calves bare. The room, so far from being too warm, was as cold as an Eskimo's front porch. Bigsby unwound the blankets and was preparing to remake his bed when he realized that the darkness that had swathed the room was graying. He glanced at his watch. It was seven o'clock.

Eight hours of sleep was Bigsby's ritual. He had had perhaps three hours' net. His head felt as if all physical underpinning had been removed, leaving it to careen about like a captive balloon. A cold shower, a shave, and a hot cup of coffee would go a long way toward reestablishing the Bigsby the world knew, but at that moment the shivering, pajamaed figure visible in the cold gray light of the Martins' den was but a wan, tired-eyed, flabby-faced effigy of that Bigsby.

A knock at the door interrupted him. "Merry Christmas!" came his host's cheery voice. "Here's a bath robe for you."

It was not a present, as Bigsby might have suspected, but a loan. The bath robe was a voluminous garment, but it

was scant for Bigsby. It left an expanse of calf visible, and its violent hues, instead of striking a cheerful note in the gloom of the moment, only made Bigsby shudder.

Nevertheless, it was not his to question why. In making his preparations for his visit, he had assumed that the Martins' guest room had a bath attached. So he draped the garment over his goose-fleshed form and, taking his razor and brushes, stole surreptitiously forth.

The bathrooms, he recalled, were at the head of the stairs. From behind one closed door came the splashing of water and childish voices raised in excited chatter. Bigsby sneaked along the hall and tried the other door tentatively—almost delicately. It held. He retreated hurriedly to the refrigerated den and sat down, to wait a more auspicious moment.

Time steam-rolled heavily along. At last a door opened and the children emerged. He advanced once again, still hoping to gain his goal unobserved. But Aunt Sarah saw him. Viewed by the dawn's early light, she, too, was an unprepossessing figure. She, however, was not so intent on her appearance as she was in achieving her goal, which was the bathroom. She won by several lengths.

Once again Bigsby withdrew to his only refuge. He waited while time once more gave the lie to the proverb that time flies. Bigsby waited and waited until it seemed to him that a maiden lady must have had time to perform her morning ablutions—and then sallied forth for the third time.

The bathroom door was still closed, but Bigsby was desperate. He advanced and tried the knob.

"Who's there?" asked a voice, as sharp as Aunt Sarah's features.

After that Bigsby lost heart. He hovered around the door of the den until the belief that Aunt Sarah must



The cold, critical eye of the rising sun revealed vestiges of a night ill spent. But Bigsby's spirits were rising.

have perished filled him with emotions in which fear and savage satisfaction were equally blended.

Robert appeared, shaved and dressed. "What?" he exclaimed. "Not dressed yet! Hurry or you'll miss the children at their stockings."

Parenthetically, it should be added that Robert had no knowledge of his guest's dilemma, else he would have told him that the door of one of the two bathrooms was apt to stick.

Bigsby took one last, lingering look toward the head of the stairs. Then he retired to the den and mournfully prepared for the day, without the stimulant of his shower and a brisk rub. He knew that his face needed shaving

and—this was one of his secrets—vigorous massaging. And he knew that every hair could not be relied upon to do its duty unless he supervised the process. In the den there was no mirror to serve as aid-de-camp.

The chair on which he had disposed his clothes was, he discovered, the same with which he had collided en route to the radiator. It lay prostrate and his clothes were under it, sadly wrinkled. But Bigsby, having run the gamut of human suffering, was beyond caring.

Fully, if not well dressed, he emerged from the den for the last time. As he did so, Junior, who had been busily experimenting with Bigsby's silk hat, gave him an abashed glance and hastily withdrew. The hat rolled across the floor.

Bigsby stooped and picked it up. Its surface, usually fair and shining, showed the contact of vandal hands. He made a half-hearted attempt to smooth the nap.

From the living room came a medley of sounds caused by the children, who were being permitted to examine their stockings. Molly and Robert were there, too full of the spirit of Christmas, as expressed in joy in their children's joy, to think of their guest at the moment.

Bigsby stood irresolute, hat still in hand. The cheerful hum of Christmas morning he enjoyed as only a bachelor with a head that felt like a ton of lead poised upon a pillar of feathers could have enjoyed it. He glanced furtively around. The opening of a door at the head of the stairs caused him to start and glance up guiltily.

It was Aunt Sarah. He gazed up at her with the countenance of a hitherto respected citizen who has been sur-

prised in his neighbor's henroost. But she disdained him.

Some minutes later, Molly returned to consciousness of her duties as a hostess.

"Why, where's Mr. Bigsby?" she asked.

Where indeed! They called and they searched, but he was not to be found. Like the Arabs, Bigsby had folded his pajamas and as silently stolen away.

"Why, he's actually gone!" declared Molly, round-eyed with wonder and dismay. "I can't understand!"

Aunt Sarah's bleak countenance relaxed in a grim smile.

"The wicked," she commented, "flee when none pursue."

But Molly didn't hear her.

"And I had a present for him—a perfectly lovely pair of bed slippers! I can't understand——"

Her voice trailed off as Robert took her in his arms.

Four blocks away Bigsby, after an apprehensive glance over his shoulder,

lessened his pace. He, too, had had a perfectly lovely present for the Martins, as he had remembered when he had looked up and encountered Aunt Sarah's frosty morning face.

It was a silver-mounted cocktail set.

Bigsby's ruffled silk hat was on one side, his muffler was awry. The cold, critical eye of the rising sun revealed vestiges of a night ill spent. But Bigsby's spirits were rising. He was going home to spend Christmas—home to his fireplace and shower bath; home to his cellaret and curiously wrought humidor. He inflated his chest and, in pure excess of emotion, twirled his cane joyously.

The policeman on the crossing surveyed him with a speculative eye. Then, as Bigsby's whirling stick pointed toward the place where the north star had lately shone, the bluecoat grinned under his heavy mustache.

"Shure," he thought, "it's my best uniform pants I'd be afther bettin' that the ould bhoy there has been doin' his Christmas celebratin' early."



THE STINGINESS OF JULIUS CÆSAR

WHENEVER he wished to inveigh against stinginess, a certain colored preacher always used Julius Cæsar as the extreme exponent of that vice. In fact, his last word of opprobrium was "as stingy as Julius Cæsar."

One day old Judge Carter, a former master in "the good old days," dropped in to hear him preach; and at the end of the service, waited for a little extra enlightenment.

"I'm interested to know why you think Julius Cæsar was so stingy," he said. "I never happened to hear that about him before."

The colored brother was naturally aghast before such a display of ignorance.

"Am it possible," he inquired in his best pulpit manner, "am it possible, Massa Judge, dat you ain't nebber heard de story 'bout our Lord an' Julius Cæsar? Ain't nobody nebber tol' you 'bout dat time when dey was raisin' money for de church, an' dey done fotched de hat to our Lord, an' He reached in an' took out a penny?"

"'What image's subscription am dis?' says He, holdin' it up for 'em all to see.

"An' de old 'postles dey all knowed who was de stingiest man in dat congregation, for dey all answered right out pernamimous.

"'Julius Cæsar!' dey say. 'Julius Cæsar!'"

Blind

By Nina Wilcox Putnam

Author of "The Obsolete Festival," "Hereditry Jane," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY CLARENCE ROWE

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be blind? And do you think that eyes have the only true vision? Read this unusually beautiful story of love and inspiration.

TR Y as he might, Basil Durant could not walk away from his trouble. Autumn was on the woods, and the air was crisp and quickening, the ground firm under the closely packed leaves. He strode on and on at a swinging pace, the young blood coursing through his frame—but the weight on his heart went with him.

The bushes and the young trees in his path suffered from the onslaughts of his cane; the wind brushed by him rudely, taking his breath. He pulled his cap more closely over his eyes and courted it, but it swept on, leaving the trouble in his mind tenacious, absorbing. To get away from the memory of his father, lying helpless in that great carved bed, the suddenly stricken eyes bandaged, the once strong voice, broken and changed, striving to give with dignity the necessary orders concerning his affairs—to get away from this, if only for an hour! But the vision persisted, and the pall of gloom over the great house back there on the hillside seemed to reach out after him, even as its gigantic shadow had stretched dark fingers across the lawn while he had retreated from it.

Again, he felt as if a heavy curtain had suddenly been dropped between him and his future, and he struggled vainly in the folds, yearning, with suffocating heart, for the bright places beyond. In that land of his vision were people with open eyes and free hands,

whom he, Basil Durant, had helped to liberate from their social and economic darkness; and among them pulsed the new religion of the future—brotherhood—of which he would have been a high priest, were it not for this that had befallen him so unforeseen, so cruelly.

Suddenly he remembered standing on an overturned packing box, the torchlight and the street lights flickering over the sea of faces below him—faces of rough, ignorant men, most of them, to whom he preached the gospel of freedom and fraternity, laborers who needed him and hailed him their choice as mouthpiece in the government. And his heart swelled and his eyes burned again at memory of the things he had seen that night, over the heads of the cheering multitude. For there against the dirty brick buildings, beyond the elevated railway, had been miraged the city to come—a clean and shining place, made by each man for his brother! And now——

How long ago was that? Only two short weeks? Impossible! Say, rather, it was a lifetime since the accident. And to-day his father lay blind and crippled, a prisoner upon his bed, while he, Basil Durant, was chained to that same bed as surely as if held by links of steel!

For there was no one else to shoulder the burden. There would be money enough from the estate, if it were properly handled, to take care of both his

father and himself—ample, in fact. But what did he, the rising young radical politician, know about farming, about tenantry— Good God! It was distasteful beyond words! It was the antithesis of everything he believed in, this property parasitism!

If it had been only a question of money, he might have got work that would have left him freedom, of course. But his father wished, with a terrible, pitiful intentness, to remain on the place that had been his home for thirty years, where his wife was buried—and to have her son close beside him in his helplessness.

"There is enough to keep you busy here," the old man had said. "And while I have the home and you, son, I shall be right enough. Things will be different now, and only you, my boy, will trouble to be company for a blind man."

The last words had settled the matter beyond dispute. Definitely, and for all time, Basil had closed the door on his own career and accepted the filial duty which the accident of a reckless chauffeur had thrust upon him. And with the verbal acceptance, had come the onrush of horror it meant—the nightmare vision of sterile years ahead, which he had this afternoon come out to escape. For the spiritual resignation



A great wave of pity swept over Durant. Mad! She must be quite mad—and so young and pitiful—a veritable Ophelia, perhaps!

to patient service was not, as yet. Would it, indeed, ever come?

Basil's gaze was upon the ground. Overhead, the squirrels chattered, busy with their winter's provisioning, but he paid them no attention. Sometimes an unseen woods creature stirred near by, but the heavy hammering in his own heart drowned out the sound of it. A grove of pines gave clear going for a space, and he almost ran over the slippery carpet of brown needles. Then came a stretch of thicket to struggle with, to work destruction on, and to

force one for a moment to consider the sting of lacerated hands rather than the pain of a tortured heart. Then the woods again—down a hill and through the white stems of birches standing stricken amid the yellow wreckage of their leaves.

This was strange country, now. Far back there, by the pine grove, which had marked the boundary of where one might, at the age of twelve, go alone, he remembered having hunted as a boy. But all these acres upon acres beyond, which were also his father's, were practically unknown. It was a splendid bit of wilderness, to be sure, and one would not have difficulty in losing one's way. Thinking of the sick man at home, he looked at his watch. It was past three o'clock, and already the sun was on the decline. He had come a long distance. Somewhat spent, both by his emotions and his physical effort, Basil leaned against a beech tree that shivered and whispered against the clear blue sky. He lit a cigarette and looked about him.

On three sides lay forest trees, aflame with color; on the fourth side, a broken fence bounded a stony pasture through which a dim trail led upward and out of sight over a knoll. He had not the remotest idea where he was, for he had walked since noon, taking no heed of direction, save that it led away from his palatial prison. The only sign of habitation here was that ancient fence and the cow path. A sound, however—a dim *whir*—was in the air, as of a gigantic and distant beehive. This faint noise held neither his curiosity nor his attention for more than a brief moment. If he were to get home before the blind man began asking for him, he must, if possible, inquire his way and find a direct road. So thinking, he aroused himself to movement once more and began the ascent before him, his nerves weary, his spirit numb.

The trail was steep and dusty. Basil

swore at it under his breath. But at last with a final effort he reached the summit—and the unexpected.

On the far side, the hill slope was much deeper than he had suspected, and in the valley below lay a miserable little town. It was clustered about a great barren factory, whence came the drone of machinery, audible even at this distance, a mile or more away.

All the near-by trees had been ruthlessly destroyed, so that the wretched, cheap little houses lay scattered on a scarred and barren valley floor, an eyesore amidst the verdant hills. Smoke from the factory had blackened the roofs, and the holdings of the cottages did not seem to permit of much in the way of gardens. A barracklike company store held one end of the straggling main street, which was merely the State highway, turned for a short span to sordid uses. A dog or two ran about in the dust, and distantly an unseen child wailed. Otherwise, the only life seemed to be in the mill with its ceaseless *hum-m-m*, its unending smoke ribbons.

Vaguely some foreknowledge of the place came back to Durant. What the deuce was it called? Ah—"Flower-ville!" That was it! Where they made the ointment, some patent stuff that they used the pine trees for. He remembered now. His father owned the land, which the company rented. A wretched place—tucked away out of sight as far as possible, on the extreme edge of the estate, but paying well. The ground rent showed that. Odd that he had never before really thought of the place as an actuality!

Of the houses—if such they could properly be called—the nearest at hand was not over an eighth of a mile below him, quite isolated from the rest, though a trifle less crudely desolate for all that, because of a garden that rioted about it in an autumn-mad debauch of blooming. It was a queer, hodgepodge

little building, constructed partially of corrugated iron and partially of odds and ends of what must at some time have been other buildings. It was small, but, beside the garden, it had one other distinguishing feature—a tiny and absurd turret, a sort of a parody of a battlemented tower, large enough for two persons to stand in, but adding tremendously, somehow, to the pitifulness of the little shack.

"I'll go there and ask about the road," said Basil Durant, and, striding down the dusty trail and in through the riotous patch of flowers, he knocked on the door.

For a moment there was silence, following on the sudden shutting off of a gust of song, and then light, hesitating footsteps crossed the floor and a young girl appeared in the doorway.

At sight of her, Basil drew back with a gasp. She was small—at first glance hardly more than a child—and her little white face was framed by long braids of red hair. However, this, although its color was extraordinary, was not what startled the attention, but her costume. It consisted of a long, loose gown of soft silk, which fell straight to her heels and was held in about the waist by a girdle of metal coins. The effect, as a whole, was that of a medieval princess, and, looking again at the face between the great red braids, he saw that she was far older than he had at first supposed—twenty probably, perhaps even more. It was puzzling—decidedly so—to find preparations for a masquerade in such a spot. At length he spoke, trying to master his amazement.

"I beg pardon, but I wanted to ask the nearest road to Belton Park," said Basil, lifting his cap and smiling.

The girl seemed as surprised at his advent as he was by her appearance, but she answered with a grave, unsmiling courtesy.

"Belton Park?" she repeated. "Why,

that is a long way off—quite out of my kingdom. I'm afraid I cannot tell you how to find it. But if you ask below, of the gatekeeper, or at the palace, perhaps one of the servants can guide you."

A great wave of pity swept over Durant. Mad! She must be quite mad—and so young and pitiful—a veritable Ophelia, perhaps!

"I might go and try—er—thank you," he replied. "Unless, perhaps, there is some one else here who would know?"

"There is no one else here just now," she replied easily. "But my uncle, the duke, will be home very shortly. Perhaps you will wait, and then he will appoint some one to set you on your road. It is quite a long way, even to our lodge gate, and you sound tired. Won't you come in and rest?"

Durant looked down toward the ugly townlet, and then at the fresh white face of the girl. How simply she spoke, and how coherently! It was apparent that she could not be dangerous, or she would not be left alone in this way. She seemed to sense his hesitation, and laughed a little, very sweetly, like a child.

"You need not be afraid of me," said she with an expressive gesture. "I'm sure you did not mean to trespass in straying into the castle grounds and even as far as my private pavilion—although you are almost the first person who has found the way through the boxwood maze! And you see, even though I am a princess, I'm just as hospitable and human as any one. So please don't hesitate to stay. There is that bench beside the door—or come inside, if you prefer, until the duke arrives!"

Still Basil hesitated, although the adventure was beginning to interest him hugely, and the situation was certainly too curious to abandon in haste.

"You say your uncle—" he began.

"He has to go down to the palace



"Then you will come back indeed, Sir Basil!" she said.

every day, you know," she explained. "So much responsibility falls on him on my account."

"And the palace?" suggested Durant, watching her closely.

"Listen!" she exclaimed, holding up one hand. "Do you hear that humming sound?"

Through the silence, came the grinding of the machinery in the mill.

"Why, yes," assented Basil, wondering.

"That noise is from my palace," she said solemnly. "When they found out about me, and while I was still a baby, they thought I would be happier in a small, beautiful nest of my own than

in a crowded court with lots of people always pitying me. So uncle had this lovely little place built for me, in order that I could live out of doors, and simply, like any other girl. Something like the place that the Queen of the French—Marie Antoinette—had, you know. And the palace itself was turned over to good works. All the poor of the neighborhood were gathered together and employed there in making a healing ointment. So that now there are no really poor people in all my kingdom, and the healing ointment is sent out from my palace over the world!"

"Oh!" said Basil blankly, beginning to wonder whether she were really crazy or merely making game of him. But the latter notion he abandoned almost immediately.

"Isn't it a splendid idea?" she asked in an awed tone. "Turning a palace into something useful? It was my uncle's own plan. He thinks of such splendid things!"

"But of course it's splendid!" he said at length, puzzled. Then, "I am, as you have guessed, a stranger in these parts, and all this is new to me. So—forgive my having to ask—but would you mind telling me your name, princess?"

"It is Faith," she said. "They called me that because they knew that I would need—faith."

"And—if I may ask again," said he, "how comes it that you are left alone?"

She laughed.

"You *must* be from far away," she exclaimed, "not even to know our customs! Why, I am alone because only members of the royal family are permitted to wait upon the princess, and my uncle is my only relative."

There was a short silence, during which he eyed her keenly. Surely, surely she could not be mad! And yet the things she said—and the curious way in which she stirred unfamiliar depths in him—— It was all very hard to comprehend.

"Will you come in and wait?" she asked.

"I—I beg your pardon for keeping you standing!" he exclaimed. "Yes, if I may, I will come in."

"We will go into the golden room," she said, leading the way with unaffected pride. "We call it that because of the gold inlaid in the ebony of the walls and the yellow damask curtains. There! Is it not pretty? I ordered each article myself—this sea-green carpet, the painting of stars upon the ceiling!"

"It is—wonderful!" said Basil, stopping short just inside the threshold, a catch in his throat.

The room in which they stood was scrupulously clean, but in that fact lay its only claim to beauty. There was a thick, but cheap Brussels carpet on the floor, hideous with red and magenta roses. The furniture was yellow oak, machine turned and sadly in need of renovating. At the windows were curtains, indeed, but made of torn and faded material; perhaps they had once been couch covers, of the cheapest sort. And the "star-painted" ceiling was of a stained and faded paper. A more pitiful place it would have been difficult

to imagine. Somehow Basil's throat went dry at the sight of it. He longed for an instant alone, to get himself in hand. If the girl thought the place as she described it, she must be mad indeed!

"I—I wonder if I might have a drink of water?" he stammered. "The dust, and the long way——"

"Of course!" she replied quickly, as solicitous as any hostess. "If you go through the door opposite, you will find the refectory. There is a little fountain on the right-hand wall, and the water runs cold and clear. There is always a goblet beside it. I would get it for you myself," she added, "but that I would surely spill some of it."

"Spill it!" he said involuntarily, so odd was the apology.

There followed a tense pause, lasting but an instant, yet charged with the sudden consciousness of an unexpected element having entered the situation. Then:

"I understand!" she said slowly. "You did not realize. I am blind."

"Blind!" he repeated stupidly, staring.

"Since before I can remember," she answered quietly. "Indeed you must be from a far country, not to have known."

He made no reply, feeling dazed, and then her laugh startled him.

"But you *didn't* know!" she cried. "Isn't that *splendid*? It shows me for the thousandth time how little my 'misfortune' matters!"

"How little?" he questioned.

"Of course!" she replied. "I always know, down deep in my heart, that it does not truly matter. But sometimes when I am here alone, I *do* mind. Somehow I can't help it. But never when uncle is at home, to see for me and tell me everything I need to know."

"But *how* can he really make up to you for such a loss?" Basil burst out.

"Oh, but he *does*!" she said quickly,

"Why, I know every detail of this house so well that I could draw it, if I had the gift. Just go and quench your thirst, and I will prove it to you! Please! Just for fun! A princess doesn't have much fun," she added wistfully, "and you are the first person, besides uncle, whom I have had a chance to show off to since I was a child."

"Very well, then," said Basil willingly. "Under your direction, I'll get the water."

"Turn with your back to the windows," she commanded. "Now you are facing a door with a sill of teakwood and a veneer of gold leaf. Pass through! Now you can see an ivory serving table, to the right of which is a little silver fountain. Is it so?"

"Yes," said Basil in a muffled voice.

"There is beaten gold about the top," she went on, "and the sun makes it warm at this hour. Above it is the goblet. It is carved of a single crystal."

"I have it," said Basil, taking down the heavy glass from its shelf above the common sink, and drinking.

He could hear her laughing and clapping her hands at the success and accuracy of her directions, and for a moment he stood quite still. Incredibly lovely child! A fairy princess in her dream castle! His brain whirled as he tried to grasp the full import of what he had stumbled upon. Then he went back to her, irresistibly drawn, now that he understood her sweet madness. He found a seat beside her.

"You are wonderful!" he said. "But tell me, princess, what do you do all day, 'way up here by yourself?"

"I have my garden," she replied promptly, "for much of the year, you know. And I let no one touch it but myself. It is not very big, for that reason."

"It is a splendid garden," exclaimed Durant fervently, "and grows royally indeed! But what else do you do?"

"Sometimes I embroider," she said. "And I can also weave. And I often go up into the turret and think of the view, and let the wind blow on my face."

"That is beautiful," said Durant.

"But best of all the things I do," she added eagerly, "is to listen to uncle when he tells me of the wonderful world, of the beautiful things in life, and how to fill the heart and mind with them so that the soul can be flooded with light, even though the eyes are dark."

"Tell me more," said he in a low voice.

"After all, it's what you see *inside yourself* that matters," she went on. "That is the true vision. I suspect that few people, even if they have eyes, can find that out all alone. They have to have help. And uncle is my help. He taught me everything I know."

"But you had the capacity for learning," said Basil. "That is a gift."

"Surely it is one we all have," she said in her wise way, "if only some one will show us how to use it."

"And are you happy?" he asked.

"Why not?" she returned. "I have a happy world. Uncle says that every one creates the world in which he lives—and I have made mine happy—by *thinking* happy, perhaps—that's all."

There was a silence, during which he looked longingly at the heavy strands of her hair. The sun caught them and spun them into fiery gold. And he looked at her white face with the "sightless" blue eyes. Presently she spoke again.

"Would you like to come up into the tower?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered, arising as she did. "I'd like to go anywhere you will take me!"

"Well, Sir Stranger," she said lightly, "come this way, if you will take a blind girl for a guide."

Stumbling, he followed her through

a dark little corridor and up a steep flight of steps, the girl going ahead with assurance, he following as best he might, unrest of body and soul besetting him. Presently they emerged upon a small platform, which formed the roof of the absurd turret he had observed from the hilltop.

"Now close your eyes," she commanded, "until I tell you to look."

"I will," he promised, obeying.

She took his hand and led him to the battlement, where she let him go.

"Now look!" she cried. "Isn't it splendid?"

Basil opened his eyes upon the hideous landscape below—the mean and sordid little town, the smoking factory, and the scarred hillsides.

"Why don't you speak?" she asked. "Don't you think it is beautiful?"

He turned to her on an impulse that he could not control and crushed both her hands in his.

"I believe that I can learn to see it so," said he, "for there is opportunity in that valley. I believe that you could show me beauty anywhere!"

She gave a half-frightened little gasp, but did not attempt to draw away.

"Who are you?" she asked. "Where do you come from?"

"My name is Basil," he told her, "and I come from over the mountain. Is that enough to tell you now?"



"And this will be your right road, sir," said the old man.

"No," she said simply, feeling the import behind his words. "No, it is not. You may be my knight, for whom I have waited, of whom I have dreamed, as I stood here high above the lovely valley and the stretches of unbroken forests. I feel as if you were he, but I am not sure. Are you a worthy knight for me?"

"Would you trust my word about that?" he asked passionately.

"Why not?" she replied simply. "Why should any one deceive me?"

Abruptly he dropped her hands, a wave of self-revelation sweeping over him. And leaning on the parapet, he gazed down upon that "lovely valley" of hers, his soul struggling with a light that almost blinded by the suddenness of its illumination. Then he turned toward her.

"I am not a worthy knight," he said humbly. "I have been a shirker and a coward. But I did not realize it, and

that is past—it is *past!* Will you believe me? And will you wish me well in battle and—and let me come to you sometimes for strength and counsel, until the fight is won?"

"Of course!" said she, her blind face illumined.

"And when that is done," he went on, coming closer, "when I have proved myself——"

"Then you will come back indeed, Sir Basil!" she said.

Somehow he could only kiss her hands. Then he dropped them.

"I am going to win!" he said in a low tone. "And I must start now! At once!"

"Very well," she replied. "We will go down."

In silence, they descended the stair and came to the door by which he had entered. The marigolds flamed on either hand, in the setting sun.

"Are you real?" he whispered. "Is any of this real, or is it all a dream?"

"All real things are made from dreams," she whispered back. "So what does it matter?"

"My beautiful!" he cried, and in another instant he had kissed her—a kiss so perfect that for a space the world held nothing else. Then he put her from him, almost roughly.

"I must go!" he said. "I must! The quicker to earn my right some day to take you with me!"

"Brave knight!" said Faith, smiling at him.

"It's late," he said a trifle unsteadily, "and some one is coming up the path from the valley."

"It is my uncle's step!" she said, straightening up a little like a listening bird. "You will meet him halfway, and he will start you right!"

"You have done that!" he cried. "Farewell, Princess Faith! I shall live in your name until I return!"

"Farewell, Sir Basil, my knight!" she answered.

Then he turned and strode off into the valley, turning now and again to look back at the white figure in the doorway, which stood as if watching him.

"And this will be your right road, sir," said the old man. "No, don't mention it, sir—no trouble at all! And indeed you may come back to her, and welcome, because"—he shifted his dinner pail and his worn coat from the right to the left arm and shook the hand that Durant extended—"because, though I've done my best to keep her happy, I'm an old man now, and there's not many that can understand what I've done, with the help of books and romances. What's that, sir? Yes indeed, if we had the money, she might be cured and see as well as yourself. If it were forty years ago, when I had a little property—— Eh, well, that's past, and such things cost more than a mill hand—— I see you understand. Well, good evening, sir!"

"Good evening!" said Basil Durant, walking off briskly. And as he swung along toward his father's house, a vision of the afternoon hung before him, opening up a shining vista of years ahead.

His little princess had taught him, not patient resignation, but living faith. Wearing her favors, he would enter the lists, no matter what the odds. And he would return.

"Cured!" he said aloud to himself, as he strode down the highway. "She could be cured! I wonder——"



The Golden Harp

By Bernice Maud Marquis

ILLUSTRATED BY ALBERT HENCKE

Chrissie is a naive little girl who plays at "make-believe." You will enjoy her account of Miss Pettingill's wonderful harp.

THE way it happened—I mean about Mary and me playing make-believe—was that none of the girls would walk home from school with Mary because she lived on the back street and wore the same dress every day. Of course she couldn't help that, because her father died, and they had a mortgage, and Mary's legs got so long that she couldn't wear her other dresses, and, besides, the twins had to have them.

Anyway, it was 'most always clean, because her mother washed it every Saturday, and it was nice and clean on Monday and Tuesday, if she was awful careful, and on Wednesday it got pretty spotty, but then she did have a clean apron, and on Friday she always said: "Oh, dear, I wish it was Monday and then my dress would be clean again."

Bessie Brown was my special chum at first on account of her eyes. I used to write on the edge of my book, "Look at me with thy soft brown eyes, Bessie, my queen." Of course it's "Philip, my king," but I had to make it my own. That's what Miss Scruggs said when the Browning class met at our house: "Make these thoughts your own. Make them your own."

When I heard Bessie say to Mary, the night she went ahead of her, "Smarty had a party, but she hadn't anything to wear," I walked up to Bessie and said, "The end hath come." Then I put my arms around Mary, be-

cause she was crying, and said, "Let's stop under the big tree till the rest of them go home, and I know the best game to play."

I really didn't know any game, but I had to do something right quick, so when we came to the big oak tree that is just halfway on the road to school and hangs over the sidewalk, we sat down and then Mary said:

"What kind of a game is it?"

I had to invent something right away and I said:

"Oh, it's just make-believe."

"How do you play it?" said Mary.

I said, "You think of something that you want awful, awful bad, then shut your eyes and begin to play that you have it, and even if you don't have it, you feel 'most as good as if you did."

Mary began to cry harder than ever and jerked away from me, but I didn't pay a bit of attention to her and went right on talking. I said:

"You think up something that you want, and I'll think up something, and then we'll meet to-morrow night after school and see who has the most interesting wish, and remember—it's a sure and certain secret. You mustn't tell a living soul."

Then Mary wiped her eyes on the corner of her underskirt, and we kissed each other good night, and Mary went away smiling.

The next day in school, every time I caught Mary's eye, I put my right finger to my nose and she did the same,



"I was so ashamed that I couldn't look up, but she put her hand on my head and said: 'It isn't fair for me to have read your story without telling you mine.'"

which was our secret sign. We could hardly wait until we got to the big tree. Mary forgot all about her dress and, besides, we played that it was pink satin. It was very interesting, because there were so many things that we wanted; only mine were not dresses and shoes, but things like bracelets and tricycles and a white feather fan and lots of grown-up things.

Sometimes Mary was in such a hurry, because she had to carry home the washing, that we couldn't take time to meet under the big tree, so we made little books and tied them with blue ribbon. Then we wrote in them every night just before we went to bed, and the next day we'd trade books.

There was one thing that I wanted that I never wrote about, because it seemed so common after all the other things we'd been wishing about. After we had played that we were great

artists and opera singers and the president's wife and a fairy princess, it seemed plebeian. Almost everything that I like to do—like wading in the creek and visiting Mr. Tabey, the shoemaker, and playing with Mary—my sister Frances says it's "so plebeian."

But I got so in the habit of writing about everything I wanted that I made another book all for myself and put on the cover, "Private Make-Believes, to be Read Only in Case of Sudden Death." The funniest thing about it was that the wish I wrote in my special book was the only one of our make-believes that ever really and truly came true, only that I didn't wear a red cap and ride in a golden chariot like the girl in the circus.

And the way it came about was on account of Miss Pettingill's harp. It was a great big harp, and all of the children who used to look at it through

her window thought it was all solid gold, but mother said it wasn't, only on the outside.

Anyway, it looked like solid gold and always shone like gold when the sun came through the window in the afternoon. It was in her front window, right beside the lace curtains. Whenever a new little girl came to town, we always took her to see Miss Pettingill's harp.

One day I heard father say, "Well, if Miss Pettingill doesn't get better pretty soon, she'll get a chance to play the harp in the next world, anyway." Father's a doctor, you know.

Then mother said, "I wonder whatever put it into the poor thing's head to buy that harp."

Just then Divvy called me to see his new rabbits, and I forgot all about Miss Pettingill and her harp. But the next day, when I stopped at father's office to ask him for some money to buy a new paint box, he said:

"Chrissie, tell Mr. Bryant, the druggist, to give you that little box of pills I ordered for Miss Pettingill and tell him you'll leave them for her as you go to school."

I gave the box to Hulda, Miss Pettingill's hired girl, and I caught a glimpse of Miss Pettingill through the bedroom door, and I was so frightened at the way she looked that I almost forgot to wait for Mary at the big tree.

When I got home that night, father asked me if I took the medicine, and then he and mother began talking some more about Miss Pettingill. Then Mrs. Claxton, who always goes where there's sickness, began to wonder whether she'd made her will, and said:

"Poor thing, she had to wait so long for her money that I reckon it never did her much good. She must 'a' been sixty, if she was a day, when her father died, and she'd never had a dollar before that she could call her own, after slavin' and savin' all her life."

"Well," mother said, "she had a trip to Chicago, at least. That was the time she bought the gold harp."

"Yes," Mrs. Claxton said, "her poor old hands were so cramped with the rheumatiz that she couldn't play it then, even if there'd been any one in Chestnut to show her how. An' them two ponies, too, eatin' their heads off, growin' fatter an' fatter every year, with no one to drive 'em."

When Mrs. Claxton said that about the ponies, I thought every one looked at me, because I felt my cheeks get red, and I ran out of doors as fast as I could.

When I got in front of Miss Pettingill's house, I heard Hulda calling:

"Chrissie, Chrissie Weston, come here!"

I wondered if the druggist had made a mistake, or whether I had given Hulda the paints instead of the pills, and my heart beat very fast because I thought it might be a poison mystery. They're very exciting to read about, but I didn't want one to happen to me.

But when I got to the door, Hulda said:

"Miss Pettingill wants to see you."

I tiptoed in, and there she was, propped up so she could get her breath. When I came in, she held out her hand to me and smiled. I had never thought about it before, but I saw now that Miss Pettingill was pretty. Even if her hair was gray, it curled all around her face, and she had pink spots on her cheeks which made her look younger. She smiled as she held out her hand to me and said:

"Come here, child. Here's a paper that you left by mistake."

And what do you suppose?

I had dropped the story that I wasn't ever going to show to any one and Miss Pettingill had read it!

I was so ashamed that I couldn't look up, but she put her hand on my head and said:

"It isn't fair for me to have read your story without telling you mine." Then she took one of my hands and patted it and said, "A long time ago, when I was a little girl, I used to play at make-believe just as you do. It was the only way that I could stand my day's work, for my father never approved of girls having good clothes and going to parties. But one time I took some money that I had earned myself and went to a concert. There was a slim young woman, dressed in white, who played the harp. She had beautiful golden hair. My hair was yellow once——"

Miss Pettingill seemed to forget all about me, for she sighed and stopped talking for a little while. Then she began again as if she hadn't noticed that she had stopped.

"Day after day, whenever I closed my eyes, I could see that girl and hear the music of that harp. Sometimes I used to go to sleep thinking about it and then I would dream that I was the girl. Year after year, I thought of the time when I could go to the city and buy a harp and learn to play on it. But I could not get the courage to ask my father for the money, for I knew he would ridicule me."

Then Miss Pettingill closed her eyes and a couple of tears ran down her cheeks, but she wiped them away and smiled and seemed to forget all about me again.

"I shall never forget the day I bought that harp," she said. "My hand shook so that I could hardly count the money, and I bought a white lace dress, too. That cost a hundred dollars. I reckon folks would make more fun of me than ever if they ever saw that dress. And those ponies—I had wanted them when I was a little girl—— I've never heard any one play a harp since that time so long ago. If I could hear it just once before——"

And then she sighed and opened her

eyes and all at once seemed to remember me.

"What have I been saying, child? I remember now what it was I wanted to say to you. Just go on playing. It's better to have dreams, even if they never come true. And who knows? Maybe they *do* come true in some other place. Don't be ashamed of your dreams, Chrissie."

But I was ashamed, for my dream was so plebeian, not at all like Miss Pettingill's, for I wanted to own some spotted ponies, just like hers, and to sit in a golden chariot with a red cap on my head, like the beautiful black-haired lady in the circus. I wanted to stand up with my hair streaming out behind me, whipping the ponies and crying, "Hip, hip!" just as we came dashing under the wire.

I felt so embarrassed, having Miss Pettingill read all of that and about the bare-back rider kissing my hand, that I told Miss Pettingill all about Mary's wishing she could have a lace dress and sing in the choir and marry the minister's son, just to get her mind off of what I had written.

But before I had finished telling her, she turned very white and called Hulda. As Hulda turned her over on the pillow, she began mumbling to herself. I couldn't hear what she said exactly, but it sounded like "Ere I pass to yon bright shore."

Then I ran home and put my secret wish in a big envelope and sealed it and hid it back of the picture of "Washington Crossing the Delaware."

The next day was Sunday, and Mary and I went over in the woods after Sunday school to gather spring beauties. Just as we came over the top of the hill where they grow thickest, we heard a noise like some one crying. And there on the ground, with his face in the grass, was a man sobbing. We stopped and looked at him and kept still because we hated to interrupt him.

He was a big man and kind of fat, with thick, black, curly hair.

As we stood looking at him, Mary whispered:

"It's the man that played the harp in the show last night."

He had a yellow piece of paper in his hand and on the grass beside him lay a yellow envelope torn in two.

"It's a telegram," whispered Mary. "Mother got one once."

Then we heard him say, "Oh, mother, mother!

It's too late!" only he said it in a queer way, like a foreigner.

Mary whispered, "Let's go!"

But all at once I remembered about Miss Pettingill's harp, and then I thought about the heroine in the book I had just finished, and how she spoke to the tramp, only it wasn't a tramp, but a rich man's son in disguise, who came back and married her after he inherited his uncle's money, and I said:

"Is there nothing I can do for you, sir?"

He looked up, and at first I was frightened, for he scowled at me so



"What do you suppose the neighbors will say?"

fiercely, and his eyes were so black and his eyebrows so bushy, that I thought maybe he might be a brigand with a price on his life. But before we could run, he smiled and called, "Hello, kidda!" His teeth were so white and his smile made him so handsome that I didn't feel one bit afraid, and we went right up to him and sat down on the grass where he asked us to.

Then he smiled again and I repeated my question. But before he had time to answer me, I began to talk to him and tell him all about Miss Pettingill's harp and how some one ought to play

it for her before she died. He must have forgotten that we were little girls and that he was a big man. He told us all about his mother dying in Italy, and how sorry he was because he could never ask her forgiveness now for going away from home and for some other things that he had done.

Then he jumped up and asked us to show him the way to Miss Pettingill's home. He took hold of my hand, and of Mary's, too, and we walked down Main Street with every one staring at us. But we didn't care one bit. I mean I didn't, but Mary pulled back just a little. She always says, when I plan things:

"What do you suppose the neighbors will say?"

When we got to Miss Pettingill's the neighbors and father and mother were there, for Miss Pettingill had just had an awful bad spell. She was propped up in bed so she could get her breath, and Mrs. Claxton was on one side of her and Hulda on the other, so her head wouldn't slip off the pillow.

The man walked right into the room and never said a word to any one. He went straight to the harp which Hulda had put at the foot of the bed where Miss Pettingill could see it. He carried it over to the side of the room where she couldn't see him and tried it first with his fingers.

Miss Pettingill's head was all dropped over to one side and you couldn't see her breathe at all until the man touched the harp. Then she opened her eyes wide and sat straight up in bed and stretched her arms in front of her.

When the man began to play, she moved her hands with him. He played,

oh, ever so much more beautifully than he had at the show. It made me think of all the things we had made believe about—golden crowns and jeweled robes and the way the creek sounds when it runs over the stones—I forgot all about Miss Pettingill and all the neighbors and thought I was floating on a cloud, dropping violets and spring beauties down on the grass.

Then Miss Pettingill gave a little cry and I remembered where I was. She was moving her hands and smiling and looking straight before her. All at once her hands dropped, and as her head fell back on the pillow, she said:

"At last!"

Mrs. Claxton said, "Oh, doctor!" and father said, "It's all over."

Mother led Mary and me out and we looked for the man, but he was gone and we never saw him again.

"Aren't you just perfectly happy?" asked Mary, as we drove through Main Street in the little basket phaëton, drawn by the little fat ponies that Miss Pettingill left me. Mary looked very sweet in the white-lace dress that Miss Pettingill left her and that her mother cut over.

"Y-e-s," I said.

But I wasn't perfectly happy. I kept thinking how much nicer it would have been if I had gone to see Miss Pettingill on purpose and before she got sick.

But before we got home, I felt more cheerful, because I began to make believe to myself that Mary and I had saddles, so we could ride the ponies in khaki suits, like girl scouts, calling on all the old ladies in town.

Old ladies are really very interesting.





Shreds *and* Patches

By Marion Short

Author of "The Famous Cochran Children," "The Road of Dreams," etc.

A Christmas love affair that came near to disaster.

WILL you ever forget Lucinda at our last dance?"

It was Clara Briggs who put the question, addressing every one in general and no one in particular. Clara, though only a small-town belle, was as modish as a Fifth Avenue suit model in full panoply.

"That sprig-lawn gown," she continued, "might have passed at a pinch; but when she wore with it a jeweled girdle with half the stones missing, and a huge brooch that had also seen service on the firing line—I thought I'd die!"

She giggled appreciatively, and there was an accompanying ripple of laughter from half a dozen other girls. They were all bending becomingly over bright bits of fancy work intended for a Christmas bazaar to benefit the local hospital.

"We'll just have to forget to send her an invitation to the Howland affair," declared June Jones, chief spokesman at the impromptu neighborhood conference. "It's the only way out."

June was a natural leader, and only one fair follower dared put up a protest. She, however, was a comparative

stranger in Shropshire, and her opinion did not count.

"But doesn't it seem rather a shame to slight Miss Latimer like that, when it would be so easy for some one to give her a little hint about clothes, instead?"

"Easy? Not at all!" June's answer was quick and decisive. "When you criticize Lucinda's wardrobe, you attack not Lucinda herself, but those two aunts of hers who decide on every stitch she wears. She is as much under their influence as a ten-year-old child. That's why her case is hopeless."

"And," supplemented Clara, holding off a piece of art embroidery to see how the colors blended, "with Dwight Howland and those other up-to-date chaps from New York invited to the dance, we simply can't afford to have her looked upon as a representative Shropshire girl."

A few mornings later, when the Shropshire post office received a batch of square white envelopes from the hands of June Jones, Lucinda Latimer's name did not appear among those to whom they were addressed.

But to be ignorant of a misfortune is the next thing to annulling it. Lu-



"I think," she said, "the gown is beautiful, and I'm going to write Aunt Lucinda a special letter of thanks."

cinda had taken an eager interest when some one had proposed a party in honor of Nellie Howland's return from California, and when the expected invitation did not arrive, she blamed the U. S. mail system for it entirely. That the "shreds and patches" which constituted her apparel had brought upon her a social boycott never once occurred to her.

"When I took Clara Briggs that slip from your winter rose this morning, Aunt Jane, I asked if her invitation had come yet, and she said it had." Lucinda, as she spoke, was cheerfully ripping apart a discarded evening gown that had belonged to her Aunt Lucinda. "I told her mine must have got lost somehow," she continued, snipping

away at some stubborn stitches with a tiny pair of scissors, "so this afternoon I spoke to the postman about it."

"And what did he say?" queried Jane. She was a spare, rawboned woman with a sharp, inquisitive nose, a high forehead surmounted by thin gray locks, and eyes that looked like a couple of shrunken blackberries.

"Why," said Lucinda, straightening up for a moment to rest her back, "he owned he did drop a batch of mail on the sidewalk that windy day, but felt sure he had picked it all up again. He's getting old, and I couldn't scold him, but I'm certain that's how it happened. Of course I shan't bother June to send me another. There's no sense in being so formal with your neighbors as all that!"

"I s'pose it was John's fault, too," quoth Jane, putting a supply of seed in the cup of her ancient canary, "that the souvenir post card I sent you from Boston last month to let you know I'd got to your Aunt Lucinda's all right never reached you. And speakin' of Lucindy," she went on, setting the jaded songster on the edge of his tub to tempt him into taking a bath, "it was mighty kind of her to let me have that velvet-and-satin brocade to make over for you—specially when she's got three daughters of her own that might have used it."

Lucinda started to say something in reply, then bit her lip and kept it back. Well she knew that the three fluffy daughters would scorn to appropriate the stiff, middle-aged garments from their mother's discarded finery that were eventually turned over to her and that she conscientiously wore to save

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encroaching on her Aunt Jane's meager purse.

She began to sing as she ripped the ruby brocade apart. It was to drown the voice of an undutiful discontent.

"The chiffon waist of this brocade is so full of holes I can't use it," complained Jane, examining it by the window. "I'll have to make your bodice out of scraps of the stuff itself. It will require considerable patchin', but patches don't show much at night."

"Suppose you make it up empire style like this one in your *Ladies' Fashion Bazaar*," ventured Lucinda. "You can get the waist part without patching it, then."

Jane stared at her niece in surprise. She had so long inscribed her own dominant ideas on the unresisting tablets of Lucinda's mind that she had almost come to consider the two minds as one, and that one hers.

"But those short-waisted empire dresses don't look sensible nor quite modest to me," she objected. "However," she continued, when Lucinda did not reply, "it *would* be considerable fuss settin' it all together from scraps."

With her mouth full of pins, she began taking measurements.

"How long do you want it? Not layin' on the ground the way you're holdin' it up to yourself?"

"If I wear it long," said Lucinda, "it will hide my cotton stockings, and the girls won't know but that I've got on silk ones, like the rest."

"That's so," agreed Jane. "And anyhow I always did think it was more modest to hide your feet all you can."

When the gown was in shape for trying on, the young girl, looking in the dim mirror above Jane's bureau, saw that, despite its unyouthful fabric, the brocade, made empire fashion, was both picturesque and becoming. Lately she had become conscious of a growing desire to express her individual ideas not only in dress, but in other ways as well.

With her nineteenth birthday in sight, was it not time for her to forsake the monotonous course of a made-to-order existence for a new, adventurous pathway, self-chosen? She mentally followed that future pathway through sun and shadow, until it stopped graciously at the threshold of a home of her own. Her Aunt Jane was kind, but Lucinda, taken in as an almost penniless orphan, had always been a mere sojourner under her roof. It was invariably "my house" when Jane referred to it, never "ours."

Lucinda's eyes were intensely blue and held hints of violet in their depths. They stared back at her now from the glass with a strange luminosity.

"I think," she said, stepping unwillingly from a dim dream chamber in gray, with drooping, golden-hued roses in crystal bowls, back to the harsh plainness of Jane's bedroom, "the gown is beautiful, and I'm going to write Aunt Lucinda a special letter of thanks."

"Got that green wool sweater done yet you was knittin' her for a Christmas present?" asked Jane. "Time is flyin', and the holidays will be here before we know it."

"It only needs a few last stitches," said Lucinda, and she allowed the folds of the brocade to crumple into a ruby swirl about her feet.

Stately Clara Briggs, the night of the Howland party, had laid aside her wraps and was standing before a mirror preparatory to dusting her aristocratic nose with a powder puff, when she suddenly started back with a stifled shriek. There behind her she saw reflected the figure of a girl in an empire gown, with a glowing rose tucked into the meshes of her dark hair; and the figure, the rose, and the empire gown belonged to none other than the deliberately omitted Lucinda Latimer.

"Did I frighten you, Clara?" the intruder laughed.

"Y-yes," stammered Clara, confused and uncomfortable. "I didn't know you had come in until I saw you in the glass. So your invitation reached you after all, did it?"

"Indeed it didn't," Lucinda answered lightly, fastening the rose more securely in its place. "I'm here without the sign of an invitation. Won't June be upset when she hears mine never got to me at all? Poor old John is half blind, you know, and must have dropped it on that windy day."

A moment later, half breathless, Miss Briggs plunged into the rainbow-hued circle of femininity concealing her hostess.

"Girls! June! What do you think? Lucinda came after all! She's upstairs now. Yes, really!" as she was pelted by a shower of surprised exclamations. "She thinks her invitation went astray. Thank Heaven, she hasn't the remotest suspicion we meant to leave her out purposely!"

"For Heaven's sake," gasped June anxiously, "tell me—what has she got on?"

Lucinda's unexpected appearance was, however, not the sole surprise the evening had to offer. Dwight Howland, Nellie's blond, athletic cousin from New York, whose magnetic smile rendered him quite alarmingly attractive to all the girls present, from the moment of meeting Lucinda, took on the look of one blissfully and completely hypnotized by the uninvited guest.

June, the recognized beauty of Shropshire, watching the couple float down the corridor in a dreamy waltz, felt personally aggrieved.

"I don't think it's good taste in Lucinda to monopolize Mr. Howland like this," she complained to Clara Briggs at her elbow.

"Oh, come now, June," said Clara, with a shrug. "There isn't one of us but would do the same if she had the

chance. Maybe it's her picturesque gown he likes. He's not only a rising young architect, you know, but a clever amateur painter as well. She probably appeals to his sense of the artistic."

"I don't see anything artistic about her," dissented June, with emphasis. "When she sits down in that brocade, you really can't tell whether she's a girl or upholstery."

Young Howland, however, did not for an instant confuse Lucinda with upholstery. She was girl, all girl, to him, sweet-eyed, golden-voiced.

"I can hardly realize," he said, during a dance they had agreed to sit out, "that the big-eyed child I used to see in Jane Latimer's garden, twisting her apron and staring at me without a word as I reached through the fence to rifle a rose, is you, really you!"

"I was dreadfully afraid of you, I remember," laughed Lucinda. "You made such faces at me, and were so fierce and tall and freckled."

A dimple appeared at the corner of her mouth, and between her full red lips there gleamed a row of perfect teeth. Howland, entranced, had the feeling of one who has made a great discovery. What a stunning beauty the shy, scrawny little girl of the garden had become! Why hadn't Nellie told him about her long ago?

Though he had intended to remain but for the week-end, Lucinda's admirer yielded with great readiness when Nellie proposed that he should tarry at the old homestead a few days more. During those few days, he was seen so often in Lucinda's company that the whole of Shropshire became electrified and agog with it.

As for Lucinda herself, her lovely dream path was opening wider and wider. Her Aunt Jane allowed her such leisure and freedom as she had never known before. She was amazed at this. She did not realize that Jane, like many another spinster, still cher-



Lucinda's unexpected appearance was, however, not the sole surprise the evening had to offer.

ished in a corner of her arid heart a little garden spot that held the echo of Love's voice, the memory of his laughter, and the thrill of the dreams he had evoked.

Besides which, Dwight was a Howland, and from Jane's earliest recollection, the Howlands had held their place as Shropshire's leading family.

There was to be a Christmas-night celebration at Nellie Howland's, and her visiting cousin's last act before leaving town was to engage Lucinda's company for the event.

"The girls are all going to dress in white, Aunt Jane," announced Lucinda happily, shaking the snow from her hat and removing her arctics after a jaunt to the heart of the village. She had been buying Christmas wreaths for Jane; Jane had a lifelong habit of Christmas wreaths. "I met Nellie on my way home, and she says it's to be a black-and-white party, except the decorations. And won't the white gowns look pretty among all those greens and reds?"

"H'm! Mebbe so. But I never did



"What's come over you, Lucindy? I reckon I'm the one to say whether you stay home or not. And I say you go, and, what's more, you'll wear your red dress and be thankful to do it!"

sée any sense in wearin' white dresses in the winter time, and don't now. You'll feel more comfortable and look more sensible in your red brocade than the rest of them in white."

And so Lucinda discovered that Jane's complaisant attitude toward Howland had left her unchanged in other respects. She was as fixed as ever in her ideas on economy.

"Well, what are you lookin' so surprised about?" she continued. "You surely ain't expectin' me to be buyin' you white dresses when you've got a good red one you ain't worn but once, and when you know I can't afford to be layin' in new duds anyhow?"

"I hadn't thought about its costin' very much," said Lucinda. "I only thought it would be nice to look like the other girls—that's all. Of course I don't want you to afford it if you can't."

"Mebbe," said Jane, softened by her niece's very proper appreciation of the state of her finances, "there'll be a trinket or two in the Christmas box your Aunt Lucindy always sends a week ahead of time. If there is, you can use 'em to touch you up a little extra if you want to."

"I expect there will be trinkets," said Lucinda quietly. "Only—I shan't need them. I've decided to stay home from the party, since I can't wear white."

She was conscious that it was the new Lucinda who was

speaking—the one who had decided to forsake a made-to-order existence and, as far as she could, mark out her own pathway.

Jane put down her crochet work so quickly that she scratched her arm on the needle.

"What's come over you, Lucindy? I reckon I'm the one to say whether you stay home or not. And I say you go, and, what's more, that you'll wear your red dress and be thankful to do it!"

"I wouldn't go to that party," said Lucinda, almost grimly, "and make Mr. Howland ashamed of me because I looked different from all the rest, if I knew it was the last dance I'd ever be invited to on earth!"

There is no meekness like unto the meekness of defeated dominance.

"I wonder," exclaimed Jane, with the gentleness of a cooing dove, "if we mightn't manage to make you up some-

thin' out of that length of white silk I bought four years ago to wear to Angie Pettis' weddin', before she changed her mind about gettin' married and took to trained-nursin' instead. Since you feel the way you do about it, I'll go up and look in my old packin' trunk and find out."

In the midst of the making of the white silk gown—slightly yellowed, it was, from disuse, to be sure, but Lucinda did not mind that—the usual Christmas box from Boston arrived. Aunt Lucinda, remembering the humbler social station of her sister and niece, usually selected gifts at once sensible and plain, with perhaps a discarded piece of jewelry thrown in for good measure; but this time, inspired perhaps by Jane's letters hinting of Lucinda's acquisition of a "beau," she had included a pair of frivolous white satin slippers. The recipient pounced upon them with a shriek of delight.

"Oh, oh, look! Slippers! Brand-new ones, and just my size, and with lovely, foolish high heels—exactly what I needed with my party gown! And, oh, Aunt Jane, that isn't all! Look here!"

She held out a flat box, ribbon crossed, in which reposed a pair of white silk stockings.

"Silk, real silk! The first pair I ever owned! Oh, isn't Aunt Lucinda a dear! And weren't you a dear, too, to give me your white silk gown? And I just can't wait for Christmas night to get here! Oh! Oh!" and she hugged Jane ecstatically. "Now I don't need to be so careful to have the gown touch the floor. I can have it real short, can't I, Aunt Jane?"

"Short as it's modest," agreed Jane, examining a gift intended for herself. "I wish Lucindy hadn't sent me this whisk-broom holder made out of celluloid. I had one once when I was a girl, and it cut me to the heart with its sharp edge every time I got out the

broom. Folks ought to be allowed to pick out their own Christmas presents, anyhow."

The ground was white when Christmas morning came. It was a dry, sparkling snow, and the diamond dust blown from its surface gave a tang to the air and assailed the eyes and freshened the cheeks of Lucinda. She had come out on Jane's little front porch to clear away the drifts. She lifted her broom to signal joyously to some passing children, though she did not know them, and was ecstatically aware of the tinkle of distant sleigh-bells.

Love, the magician, had waved his wand above her head, and it seemed to her that she had never beheld such a glittering day, or realized before what a pretty town Shropshire was, or how kind people were, or what a wonderful thing it was just to be young and alive!

A five-pound box of chocolates had arrived from Howland the day before, with a real bow of ribbon in the hair of the brunette beauty on its cover.

"I wonder if he didn't think she looked a little like me," mused the romantic recipient, as she fluffed out the bow with caressing fingers.

Accompanying the box was a note containing the sender's holiday greetings, and expressing his eagerness for the annihilation of the weary Now and the swift arrival of the ecstatic Then.

"Why shouldn't I be just the happiest girl in the world?" Lucinda asked herself, and could find no answer to the question.

But sometimes it's just when things look rosiest that trouble suddenly appears to pounce upon us and wrest from us our joy. You can't induce a New England tobacco raiser to admire a rosy cloud overhead, try as you may. Its beauty means to him only a potential hailstorm and the prospect of a flourishing crop slit to ribbons and ruined in a few cataclysmic moments.

Lucinda's hailstorm was on its way,

but she did not know it, and basked luxuriously in the rosy glow of her dream cloud.

It was not until Dwight Howland had been duly admitted to the old-fashioned haircloth and oval-frame parlor, and was seated on the sofa with Jane's twin wreaths staring at him from the front windows like giant spectacles, that Lucinda, fluttering about busily in the room above, made an awful discovery—the silk stockings her aunt Lucinda had sent her did not match!

Not only that, but the difference was glaringly apparent. The left one was of elaborate openwork, and through it the wearer's slim ankle shone pinkly, almost nakedly, while the right one was heavily woven, dead white, and opaque. In short, Lucinda was the victim of one of those incredible, yet common, mistakes made by a packer of holiday goods.

Christmas night, and not a village store open, and not another pair of white stockings in the house—nothing but the plain black cotton ones Jane always selected! Why, such a catastrophe was too ludicrous, too grotesque, to happen to any one, Lucinda told herself, least of all the girl who was least prepared to face it. She stared down at her nether extremities helplessly. She felt a wild desire to laugh, but a still stronger one to cry.

Meanwhile, Jane, sitting stiffly on the edge of a stiff-backed chair, was doing her best to entertain the waiting young man. He, listening to that occasional footfall overhead, was dimly aware that she was telling him something tiresome about a Christmas tree in the county home, and, being a wise youth, he bore the set look of one profoundly entertained; but his mind was a whole flight of stairs above the county home, and remained there.

"Comin' down pretty soon, ain't you, Lucindy?" Jane called up from the newel-post, a quarter of an hour later.

"Right away," answered Lucinda, in a high treble of affected cheerfulness.

Jane excused herself, and went out to see to something in the kitchen, and as soon as Howland heard the rustle of Lucinda's garments, he stood up expectantly. But his glowing anticipations of seeing a holiday girl, all ready for the swift spin to Nellie's in his waiting sleigh, were doomed to disappointment.

"Wh-why, girlie!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "I thought you'd come down all bundled up in furs! Am I too early or—or what is it?"

Lucinda reddened violently. You may tell a young man many things in all frankness, but you simply cannot confess to him that you are obliged to remain away from his cousin's party because you do not match. She had her hasty little lie all studied out, but, being unused to falsehood, she was so nervous over it that it was difficult for her to say a word. But finally, after a hysterical little giggle, she began:

"I can't go with you to the dance after all, Mr. Howland. Please tell Nellie I'm so sorry and just as disappointed as I can be about it. But when you fully expect to go, and then find out at the very last minute that your stock—"

She paused, choking back the betraying word, appalled! Almost, in spite of her sentinel lie, the truth had forced itself from her candid lips.

"I mean," she resumed, spasmodically, "that I upset the ink bottle and spoiled the white party gown I intended to wear. I expected to have such a lovely time, and I've looked forward to it, but—but, you see, all I can do is to give up going and stay at home."

"Oh, no, I can't consent to your remaining at home," declared Howland masterfully. "Of course it's a shame such an accident had to happen, but you can't make me believe I've made

the trip down here all for nothing. Why, I wouldn't have thought of promising Nellie I'd come to her evergreen affair but for you, and you know it. Wear the gown anyhow. Nobody will notice an ink spot," he concluded, boldly disparaging the eyesight of all Shropshire.

But Lucinda remained firm, not because she wanted to, but because she knew she must.

"No, no, that ink spot is too dreadful," she reiterated mechanically, as he kept on pleading. "Please don't ask me again! I can't go! I can't!"

Then, suddenly, the already trying situation became acutely so.

With Lucinda's white silk gown thrown across her arm, Jane, all unheralded, loomed up in the doorway. In each thin cheek flamed a spot of indignation.

"Where's the ink spot?" she demanded ruthlessly, heedless of Lucinda's paling lips and blue, imploring eyes. "I couldn't help hearin' what you was sayin'," she continued, "and I want to know when you spilled ink on it, and where, and if you did, why you never said a word about it to me! I've looked it all over, right side and wrong, and I can't see the sign of a blemish anywhere."

With that she gave the limp garment a wrathful flap, and Lucinda's poor little lie emerged from somewhere between the white folds and flew about



"You need not have gone to so much trouble to make me understand my company was not agreeable, Miss Latimer. I may be pretty thick, but it's not as bad as all that."

the room, vainly seeking for a place to hide its diminished head.

"Do you see anything wrong with it?" Jane demanded of Howland, and advanced to exhibit the unmarred surface to him, but her niece, suddenly galvanized into action, sprang toward her, wrenching the gown from her grasp.

"You needn't show it to any one, Aunt Jane! I told a fib when I said I spilled the ink. I didn't spill it at all. It—it wasn't the gown that was the trouble. I just thought I didn't care to go to the party after all, and made up the ink as an excuse to stay at home."

No sooner were the words said than she realized that if her first lie had been unskillful, this one was simply dis-

astrous. It took on a meaning she had never intended.

There was a moment's pause, filled with a silence so deep and wide it seemed to flow like a river between her and Howland. All at once, he had become remote, dignified, cold, yet without changing his position or moving a muscle.

"You need not have gone to so much trouble to make me understand my company was not agreeable, Miss Latimer. I may be pretty thick, but it's not as bad as all that."

Lucinda was sickeningly conscious of a courtly bow, a closing door, and then—her convulsive hold on the mass of crushed silk relaxed and it slid unheeded to the floor.

Jane, who began to sense dimly the fact that she had probably made a mistake in interfering in a situation she did not understand, demanded a full explanation of Lucinda's extraordinary conduct—and got it.

"They're hanging over the footboard of my bed now. You can see them for yourself. Oh, I wouldn't mind missing the party, a thousand parties! But when you cornered me like that, Aunt Jane— Of course I don't blame you—you didn't know! But I wish you hadn't! I—I lost my wits entirely, and he—he thinks I wanted to get rid of him! He'll never want to see me again, and he's been so kind, so splendid! And he was beginning to care for me—I know he was—and now—now—"

A tear rolled crookedly down her cheek and splashed on her little clenched hand. Even after the remorseful Jane had put her to bed and given her a cup of tea, she wept on and on, as what girl wouldn't who sees a lovely new pathway end abruptly at a signpost with a couple of mismatched stockings draped over it, and bearing the blighting inscription: "Here ends everything!"

From where she lay, by putting an extra pillow under her head, she could discern through the meshes of her bedroom curtains the lights in Nellie Howland's home. Those lights grew in number and splendor as she looked.

There, in the radiance of the big fireplace, white-clad girls, in dainty slippers and stockings that were happily twins, were dancing. And she had expected to be among them, the gayest of them all! How ready any one of them would be to console Dwight Howland for her absence! That piercing thought brought her out of bed and over to the window at a bound. She could almost see June Jones smiling up at him now, or perhaps it was Clara Briggs.

"But none of them can ever care for him as I do," she murmured, pressing her face against the cold windowpane and blurring it with her tears. "I could have lived in an ice cave in Greenland and been happy—if only with him! I could have fought my way beside him through African jungles, and when the thorns scratched me, I would have smiled!"

Youth may be ludicrously high-flown when it suffers, but, oh, how deeply sincere!

Yielding to a sudden frantic impulse, Lucinda threw open the window, resolved to stand there in her one thin garment, letting the wintry wind blow in on her as it would, so that she might, as her Aunt Jane would have phrased it, "catch her death of cold."

But simply standing still and catching one's death of cold becomes monotonous after a time; so presently, with chattering teeth, she closed the window and accepted the return of warmth and common sense.

Besides, she had just thought of a way to obtain relief from benumbing inaction. Of course she could never again be even friends with Howland, for the impossibility of explaining her

conduct must always remain; still, it were only an act of courtesy to write him a note acknowledging his Christmas gift.

Not one word of thanks had she spoken that evening for the huddled sweets above which the lady with the bright bow sat and smiled! No, she remembered ruefully; instead, her time had been entirely taken up with wrecking her own happiness during his brief stay.

Stealthily, so as not to attract the attention of Jane, she lit her lamp and opened the drawer of a small table. She began by directing an envelope to the young man, but scarcely had she done so when she shoved it aside and began scribbling off a letter to her Aunt Lucinda instead. Aunt Lucinda had daughters of her own. Aunt Lucinda would understand. Afterward, she would write her prim thanks to Howland. She wrote:

Oh, auntie, auntie, what do you think has happened? Such an awful thing! Such a terrible tragedy! And all on account of—what do you think?—a pair of stockings! To have one's heart broken, and lose one's sweetheart—and all in just a few terrible minutes—and miss the grandest party of the year besides—all because one of those lovely stockings you sent me was lace and the other plain! I didn't know until just the last minute. I had to stay at home, and, in trying to explain, I told a lie, a stupid, stupid lie—and I know I've lost him forever, for he could not understand! Oh, Aunt Lucinda, maybe I shouldn't own up to it—maybe I wouldn't if I waited to calm down—but I love Dwight Howland heart and soul, and now—I'll just have to be single and

lonesome all my life, like Aunt Jane, for I can never, never, never love anybody else!

She turned a page and wrote on and on, finally squeezing in her name where there wasn't room for it.

Then she read it over. If only Dwight Howland could stand at her shoulder and read it, too, she thought,



She turned a page and wrote on and on, finally squeezing in her name where there wasn't room for it.

he would pity her and forgive—he could not help it!

She took up the envelope she had addressed to him and stared at it mournfully, and then her eyes followed again some of those eloquent lines she had written to her Aunt Lucinda.

"If he could only, only read what I have written!" she murmured again.

Suddenly she gave a little gasp, and the pen she had picked up to address an envelope to her Boston aunt dropped from her fingers to the floor. But Lucinda, strangely enough, did not stoop to pick it up. She was thinking, thinking hard. Was a drowning man ever

saved by catching at a straw, she wondered. For Lucinda had visioned a straw.

The next afternoon, when Lucinda heard the sound of an unmistakable baritone voice in the hall below inquiring if she were at home, she plunged headlong into a closet and shut the door upon herself, hugging, in a very ecstasy of confusion, rapture, and fear, such garments as were hanging there. But by the time Jane, looking rather bewildered, had reached the upper landing to whisper the caller's name, she had emerged and wore an air of supernatural indifference.

"Oh, Mr. Howland—— Let me go! You mustn't—you m-m——"

The rest of her protest was smothered, for as soon as she stepped inside the parlor door, two arms went about her and held her close, two bold lips claimed their first kiss, then another, then another!

"Do you know what brought me back, sweetheart? Look! Look there!" and he held out toward her the thickly written sheets of a very wordy letter.

The blood surged hotly to Lucinda's cheeks.

"Why, it's—it's what I wrote Aunt Lucinda last night! How did you——" Then her eyes fell and she turned away, burying her face in her hands.

"Don't be frightened, dear," he laughed joyously, struggling to remove those hands. "Look at me, and see how happy I am! Why, I wouldn't trade places with any one in the whole wide world! You made a mistake and put the letter you wrote her in my envelope, and I suppose what was meant for me went to her instead. She's welcome to it, for, Lucinda, if I hadn't read this—if I hadn't learned just how the whole thing happened—I would always have thought you hated me. Nothing could ever have induced me to come near you again. But now—— Oh, Lucinda!"

And it was not until toward the close of their blissful honeymoon, some three months later, that Lucinda summoned up courage to confess that she made the mistake of putting the right letter in the wrong envelope—*on purpose!*



A SINGER

DEAD maker of dear songs,
Of music that can wake
New music in ourselves
Who can no music make,

In all your words I found
His thoughts and mine laid bare;
Our unawaredness
By you was made aware.

But now our love is gone,
Is gone with dawn and spring,
And I have laid your book away.
I dare not hear you sing.

MARY CAROLYN DAVIES

Modern Much

By Kay Cleaver Strahan

Author of the "Peggy-Mary" Series, "The Joyous Joke," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY E. A. FURMAN

The story of a woman who loved babies but could not love her fiance in "the modern way."

EVEN the most modern people with the most modern views and vocabularies never spoke of Alice Crichton as a bachelor girl; they called her an old maid. It sounds unkind, but it seemed the only suitable thing to call her, because she looked exactly like the old-fashioned meaning of those words. She was stringy instead of slender, lengthy instead of tall. Her hair was not quite light brown, and it never reminded any one of molten copper or of brown birds' breasts or of suntinged autumn leaves or of anything but straight, serviceable hair. Her eyes were big and gray, but the neat, rimless glasses in front of them precluded their possibilities for beauty—made them into mediocre eyes that matched the pattern primness of her other features.

She lived with a deaf old aunt who never tried to be agreeable and who did not need to try to be disagreeable because a lifetime of practice at the business of hatefulness had made her thoroughly proficient in it. About twenty times each day, she called Alice a fool; once in a great while she admitted, to herself, that Alice was a sensible woman; always she treated her as she might have treated a mischievous idiot child.

Now Alice was not any of these things—not a fool, not a sensible woman, not a child. Her age was not very old—just on the sensible side of thirty; her mind was about as old as

that, too; but her heart—or her soul; whichever you choose—was on the silly side of sixteen. She had a passion for pink which she never indulged; she had a passion for adoration in which no one ever indulged her; she would have liked to spell her name with a y and an s; and she had a hero sweetheart about whom she used to dream in the moonlight, out under the hawthorn tree in the side yard, until she was throbbing, blissfully unhappy. Do remember, though, that this is her heart—or her soul—of which we are speaking, a place into which no outsider has any business to pry. If any of Alice's friends had given thought to the matter, which they did not, they would have considered her precisely as sentimental as—well, say a tea-towel rack, excepting where babies were concerned.

Babies were an obsession with Alice. She cried over them when they were a few hours old and, after that, laughed over them and loved over them and poked them and had them hold her fingers and talked baby talk to them until even the youngest mother told the youngest father that Alice Crichton really made her feel silly about baby. That is going pretty far, you know.

All of her spare time, or nearly all of it, she used up in making things—crocheting booties or bonnets, or embroidering bibs—presumably for other people's babies. Presumably, because sometimes, when the disagreeable aunt was resting, Alice made an extra bon-



By daylight she screamed the most disagreeable parts of the daily papers into her aunt's ear trumpet.

net or jacket or bib and tucked it away among rose-leaf pads in the lower drawer of her dresser, the one with a key to it, along with her copy of "Maurine" and her favorite dream.

Her favorite dream had nothing to do with castles in Spain, had everything to do with a crib in the east room whose windows looked out into the hawthorn tree. In the crib was a baby, pink and bald, the pinker the better, the balder the better, because the younger the better. If it were very, very young, Alice thought, it would seem exactly like her own baby and not at all like

an adopted baby, brought from the home for stray babies. Her disagreeable aunt would have welcomed a cribful of baby with the same cordiality with which she would have welcomed a cribful of nitroglycerin, so that was why Alice locked the dream in the drawer with "Maurine." And the book explains a bit why the baby was always dreamed of as an adopted baby.

"Maurine" was Alice's chief emotional dissipation. By daylight she screamed the most disagreeable parts of the daily papers into her aunt's ear trumpet. By night light, usually, she

read whatever book her study club was "taking" at the time. But once in a while, when the moonlight had been particularly generous or when the perfume of the hawthorn had been especially penetrating, she sneaked the poem from its hiding place and managed to convince herself that she, like its heroine, had renounced her lover for some "Helen, little Helen, frail and fair." She hadn't, of course, and she knew she hadn't. But what difference did that make?

Truly, her romance, or what she chose to think of as her romance, had been a most skimpy affair, a mere skeleton romance at best—a young doctor who had boarded next door; a few talks under the hawthorn tree; a few, a very few confidences; and a totally platonic, commonplace parting, because the young doctor had been going to Europe to study.

But her romance was twelve years old, and many things may happen to a romance by the time it is that age. She had fed hers and cuddled it and petted it until, at the end of the twelve years, the plump, pretty thing would have been unrecognizable to any one who had known it in its youth.

Eight years before, rumor had told her that the doctor had married. Her romance had sickened then, for a month or two, but she had nursed it carefully and kept it alive. Soon it had been flourishing so blithely that Alice had quite forgotten its illness and had almost forgotten the cause of its illness. But never during hawthorn-blossom time, rarely during any time, did she forget Sylvester Minich. That was his name. It did not matter, because Alice considered it the most beautiful name in the world.

So no wonder, when the disagreeable aunt was suddenly made a bit less disagreeable by a stroke of paralysis, and the family physician—old, of course, and easily daunted—suggested that he

would like to call a certain Doctor Minich in consultation—no wonder that something snatched at Alice's heart.

Doctor Minich, the next day, said, "How do you do, Miss Crichton?" as casually as he had said, "Good-by, Miss Crichton," twelve years before. No, he had not grown old or fat or bald. He was still almost handsome; he still had broad shoulders and was above the average height; he still had waves in his brown hair. What if the shoulders had rounded a trifle; what if a few nervous furrows had marked themselves in his face; what if gray hairs waved with the brown ones? Love is never microscopic.

A few weeks later, the disagreeable aunt did the first agreeable thing she had done for many years. She died, thus removing from Alice's slender shoulders a burden that had threatened to be too heavy for her to carry much longer.

Doctor Minich was the sort of person who can understand only comparatively. When his wife had died, three years before, he had suffered keenly; so now he sympathized stupidly, but sincerely, with Alice over what he termed her "deep affliction." Because his sympathy was the sweetest thing she had ever experienced, she did not try to explain it away.

"I think you are alone too much," he said to her one white winter afternoon when he had stopped in for a few minutes to cheer her up. "You should have more company and less time to think and brood."

Alice agreed with him, and then she told him, tentatively, that she was considering the idea of adopting a baby. It was the first time the dream had ever come out of the drawer to appear in public and its debut was something of a failure; it was tremulous and timid; it did not do itself justice.

Doctor Minich laughed at it. He told Alice that babies were a care and

that what she needed now was rest and recreation, and he advised her with emphasis to wait until she was stronger. She accepted his advice, gratefully, and promised to take it.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "since you are so fond of babies, my kiddies might interest you?"

"Your—what?" gasped Alice. "I—I—I didn't know you had any children."

"Indeed I have. Twins—four years old. I'll bring them over if you'd like to see them."

Of a sudden there seemed to be nothing in the big world that she would like so much. But she managed not to say it like that. She managed to keep almost all of the intense eagerness out of her voice as she assured him that she would be delighted to have them come to see her.

They came a few days later, Sylvester and Sylvia—Alice gloated over their names—bashful, pudgy, cleanly washed little folks who sat silent, staring in round-eyed wonder. Alice proffered picture books and cookies, and despaired because she was sure they were having a dull time. But when Doctor Minich came to take them home, they waited to be allowed to stay a little longer. Those wails were very dear to Alice.

He brought them often after that, and then more often. Sometimes the three of them would stay a little longer and, after dinner, would go into the uncomfortable "front parlor," and the babies would drowse in Alice's lap while she placidly discussed with her guest the war, or the weather, or Doctor Minich's nerves—a favorite topic.

But after they had gone, Alice would often go out into the yard, for winter was waking into spring, and discuss living and loving with the blossoms and the moon until, somewhat ashamed, but wholly happy, she would hurry to bed and lie awake during wonderful, dream-filled hours.

She knew it would come, of course—what she was hoping for, what she was dreaming of; women always do know things like that.

It did come. One day in mating time—almost as easily as he had said, "How do you do?" almost as casually as he had said, "Good-by"—Doctor Minich asked Alice to marry him. His proposal was practical and sensible, far removed from the regions of romance. The children were fond of her; they needed a mother. He was fond of her; he needed a wife. He was not a rich man, but he had enough for them to live on comfortably and his life was insured for a fair amount. Would she marry him? After Alice had said yes, he kissed her and hurried away to old Mrs. T. W. Jones, who was suffering from acute indigestion.

Alice and the doctor decided that the coming October would be a suitable month for the wedding. In the meantime, he was as devoted as a busy, middle-aged, self-centered professional man could be expected to be. He called on her, with the children, several times each week, and while the children played or drowsed, he and Alice discussed the war, or the weather, or his nerves. He took the children home early always and, always, they and he kissed Alice good-by.

But she was happy; not serenely, contentedly happy, as befitted the circumstances and her years, but frivolously, excitedly happy. She curled her straight hair, of course; she tried to rub from her prim face the wrinkles made by years of patience; she added touches of color, usually rose color, to her dull-toned dresses. Perhaps she was wise enough to know that an attempt to disguise her happiness by simulated indifference or coyness would be silly and useless. At any rate, she made no such attempt; she wore her happiness on the outside for all to see; she almost flaunted it.



They came a few days later, Sylvester and Sylvia, bashful, pudgy, cleanly washed little folks.

"Maurine" was seldom opened during those days. Old memories are not necessary when one has new realities. But the locked drawer was often opened. Alice poked her thin fingers into the tiny sleeves and smiled over the dainty bonnets and jackets and bibs as girls smile over their trousseaus. Though she was by no means indifferent to her trousseau. The words "mother" and "wife" were indivisible in her vocabulary.

"Well, Alice, I hope you'll be as happy as you expect to be," said her best friend, Louise Stratford, one blue-and-yellow summer afternoon when Alice had "run over" to borrow a pattern for kitchen aprons which would be pretty as well as practical.

"Yes, but why accent the 'hope'?" smiled Alice.

"Because I think you love Doctor Minich too much."

"Too much?"

"Um-hum. It isn't wise for a woman to love a man—too much."

"But, Louise, I don't understand. You love Rod?"

"Yes," replied Louise, "of course I do—enough to be comfortable."

Alice laughed.

"You married people are always saying the oddest things!"

"You'll see," sighed Louise.

"Of course, dear," said Alice softly, pityingly, "you and Rod have never had children——"

"No, thank goodness!"

"Thank goodness! Why—Louise, what do you mean?"

"We don't care for children. We don't want them," explained Louise.

"Don't care for them!" echoed Alice dully. "Don't want them!"

Of a sudden Alice felt tired, weak, almost ill. A world that contained people who did not care for children, did not want children, was a cruelly new world to her. She walked home through the blazing sunshine without opening her parasol; she was not conscious that the sun was shining.

That evening, when the twins had nodded into Sleepy Land, she told the doctor about it—told him haltingly, but expectantly. He would surely have some scientifically satisfactory explanation that would light the dreary blackness of it all.

"Of course," he answered slowly, "I don't agree with Louise and Rod. I think people are better off, happier, if they have children. But I do think that nowadays, what with the high cost of living and the necessity of education, people, unless they are very wealthy, have no right to have more than one or two children."

"But you—we—you have two children—now."

"Yes, and I pray God each day that I may be able to give them every advantage," answered the doctor, looking lovingly at his rosy pair. "We'll have just about a two-children income, you know," he added lightly. "I want Sylvester to be a physician, of course, and I'd like to have Sylvia—"

"Only," interrupted Alice, "only—you don't mean that you don't want—other children, new little babies, do you?"

"Frankly," he answered, still lightly, "I don't see how we could ever afford them."

"Afford them!" repeated Alice. "Afford them! You speak of them as if they were—automobiles!" Then, clutching at her happiness, "But—supposing they—just come."

"You aren't a schoolgirl." The doctor spoke sternly now, not lightly.

"You're a modern woman, so you must know that modern babies are rather like automobiles—a luxury—and that they don't 'just come!'"

"Modern babies," mused Alice, "modern babies. What an odd combination of words!" She walked to the window. In the big, dark-blue hollow of the sky there was a piece of a moon and many, many tiny stars. "I used to tell little tots," she said, not turning toward the doctor as she spoke, so he may not have heard her at all, "I used to tell them that a moon like this was a big cooky the angels were eating, and that the stars were the crumbs. Other times I used to say that the sun was the papa who worked so hard for his big family, all day long, that he needed to go to bed very early, and that the moon was the mamma, and the stars were their happy, laughing babies. But now— Now what could I tell them about a modern moon and modern stars? That it was the headlight for a big, roaring engine, and that the stars were—sparks that burned?" She turned toward the doctor and laughed, shrilly, almost hysterically.

"Alice, my dear, aren't you feeling well?"

"Tired. I'm extremely tired."

"Perhaps we'd better leave, so that you may rest?"

"Perhaps. Please."

Only the children kissed Alice goodbye that evening, but Doctor Minich seemed not to notice the omission.

Alice, as soon as they were gone, went into her bedroom and opened the locked drawer. Burrowing with her thin hands deep among the tiny things, she found "Maurine" and took it out and carried it into the parlor and tossed it into the grate and set a lighted match to it. As she watched it burn, her heart—or her soul—journeyed quickly up through the years and found a resting place on the sensible side of thirty.

Three days later, when Louise Strat-

ford stopped in at Alice's home to see how the new aprons were coming on, she found Alice in the east room, not sewing, but rocking contentedly, with a bundle in her arms. Alice greeted her with a warning "Sh-h-h!" and a finger to her lips.

"Why, what have you there?" exclaimed Louise, paying no attention to the silence signal.

"An unmodern baby," whispered Alice.

"A—what?"

"A baby. Sh-h-h!"

"Whose is it?"

"Mine."

"Yours! Why, Alice Crich-ton, have you gone crazy?"

"No," said Alice, smiling serenely, "no, I think I have gone sane—at last."

Louise dropped into a chair.

"Where," she demanded, "did you get it?"

"Her," corrected Alice. "I got her from the baby home. I've adopted her."

"Well!" flatly, and then, "What does Doctor Minich think about this?"

"I haven't asked his opinion."

"But, Alice, you should——"

"Because," continued Alice, "I am not going to marry Doctor Minich."

"A quarrel! Dear, I am so sorry!"

"No, we haven't quarreled. I don't need sympathy. I changed my mind—that was all."

"You changed your mind?" Louise halted dazedly between each word.

Alice nodded and rocked contentedly.

"It was easier," she said, "to change my mind than to change—all the rest of me. By the way"—she turned the subject hastily as if she had said more than she had cared to say—"I'm going to have the hawthorn tree cut down to-



Alice greeted her with a warning "Sh-h-h!" and a finger to her lips.

morrow. It keeps the sunshine out of this room."

"Your beautiful tree cut down!" gasped Louise.

Alice smiled and nodded and peeked down into her lap at a wee pink head, entirely bald.

"But about your—trouble," persisted Louise. "I don't understand it—because you don't mean that I should understand it, I suppose. But I'm sure you'll be sorry, later. You loved the doctor very much."

"No, I'll not be sorry. I know. I did love Sylvester very much, but—not that much."

"Not that much?"

"I mean," said Alice, "modern much."

The Footpath Way

By Anne O'Hagan

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Janet Fowler and her cousin, Beatrice Hines, are the daughters of men whose dishonorable failure brought disaster upon hundreds of families in the little New England town of Berwickbury. Beatrice, a selfish, sophisticated young person, becomes an interior decorator in New York, while Janet, burning with the desire to make reparation for her father's crime, stays on in Berwickbury, taking a position in the office of Douglas Deering, a builder, one of the men ruined by her father. Janet's efficiency and zeal arouse old Deering's waning ambition and infuse new life into his business. Urged on by her, he decides to put in a bid for the State insane hospital to be erected in Berwickbury, a much larger project than any he has ever attempted. Shortly before the bids are to be in, Deering is stricken with paralysis. His mental faculties are unimpaired, however, and his determination to go on with the hospital affair is so strong that he succeeds in inducing his son, Hugh, to give up his position in New York and take charge of the Berwickbury business. Hugh and Janet are much attracted to each other, but both are aware that there can be nothing more than friendship between them. While in New York, Hugh has become engaged to Beatrice Hines, though he is uneasily aware that he is not really in love with her. Janet knows of this engagement. The day before the hospital bids are due, Hugh receives word that the company which was to go on his father's bond does not care to take the risk with an untried man at the head of the business. This decision is patently due to the influence of Deering's most important rival for the hospital contract. Hugh sees nothing to do but accept defeat philosophically, but Janet will not give up. She asks for a day's leave of absence from the office, and goes down to New York. When she returns that evening, she has a check to cover the amount of the bond. She has interested a wealthy cousin, Fowler Ashdown, in the hospital contract and has secured a loan from him. Intoxicated by this eleventh-hour victory, Janet and Hugh are swept out of their carefully maintained attitude of friendship into a sudden realization of their love for each other. Both of them, however, feel that Hugh is still bound in honor to Beatrice, and they have made up their minds to a life of renunciation when Beatrice herself arrives in town to break her engagement with Hugh. She has promised to marry an old multimillionaire, Joel Creamer, who is divorcing his wife for her. Janet and Hugh are married shortly afterward. In spite of their great love for each other, there is friction between them almost from the first. Janet insists upon continuing her work at the office, and Hugh, who has old-fashioned prejudices, resents this. Also, Janet is no housekeeper, and Hugh attributes the condition of chaos that soon arises in the household to the fact that his wife is away all day. When he learns that a baby is coming, he feels still more strongly that her place is at home. In the meanwhile, Joel Creamer has got his divorce, and Beatrice returns to Berwickbury for a splendid wedding. A few hours later, she is a widow. Joel Creamer has been killed in the wreck of the train on which he set out on his honeymoon.

The Footpath Way

By Anne O'Hagan

Author of "Out of the Storm," "The Lady of Rocca Pirenza," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY E. C. CASWELL

A big, vital story of married life. The first installment appeared in the November number. On the opposite page read what has already happened in the story.

CHAPTER XI.

DOCTOR MURRAY was old-fashioned. He boasted the fact himself, and many of his patients shared his feeling in regard to it. They knew that it had spared them the expense of many newfangled operations, and that it had, on the whole, kept them in as good condition as the very last word in medicine kept its devotees. But Janet had stormed the citadel of his old-fashionedness and had won at least a partial victory.

Never, she maintained, had she felt so well and vigorous, so capable of a full day's work, as during those early months of her pregnancy. Her looks bore out the truth of her statement. The color that had seemed so brilliant on the day of Beatrice's wedding continued to flush her cheeks, the same lustrous fires to light her eyes. Her hair, even, seemed to partake of the magnificent vitality that flooded her and shone and sparkled as it had never done before. Hugh, baffled by the spectacle of her physical magnificence, as well as by the obstinacy with which she clung to her point, finally left the decision with Doctor Murray, and both of them went down to defeat.

Hugh did not underestimate his wife's importance to his business. He knew that to replace her would be a difficult and costly matter; her method was admirable, her energy boundless, her intelligence clear and keen, and

then, of course, her devotion was perfect. The work on the State hospital took most of his own time, and there were new contracts in the office, won by the prestige the State hospital had conferred upon it. The office had been enlarged by three new rooms, the staff by half a dozen young men.

Oh, business was booming, and it was Janet's faith that had given it its start, and Janet's system that kept it moving so smoothly. It was quite true, as she told him with a humorous exaggeration of boastfulness, that it would be a long time before he would be again so well "suited." And for forty dollars a week, too! That was the sum charged against her now on the ever-lengthening pay roll. He knew that it would be quite a different figure when the new office manager came to take her place. Quite a different set of figures, for of course the new office manager would not regard it as part of his work to be secretary to the concern as well—and stenographer and file clerk and telephone girl, too.

But important as was economy at present, important as were system and intelligence and devotion and all the rest of Janet's gifts to the business, the health of his wife, the health of their child, the comfort of their home, were of more importance still.

Finally it was neither Doctor Murray's reluctant consent to Janet's plan of remaining at work until the first of

August, nor even the spectacle of the girl's superb strength, that won him to an easy mind. It was his father.

"Murray's an old fool!" growled Douglas Deering. "An illogical old hypocrite! Does he tell Mrs. Dooley, his washerwoman, to give up laundry work for seven or eight months before the birth of her children? He'd be wearing celluloid collars if he did! Why, boy, your mother—your mother"—he looked at the crayon portrait opposite his bed, and its bleak, expressionless gray lines somehow miraculously recalled to him the living face he had loved—"she worked harder up to within a few days of your birth and of Effie's than Janey has ever worked in her life. Murray's an old fool! Your mother sewed and swept and washed and ironed and planted her vegetable patch and cooked and fed the chickens and put up preserves for the winter and went to church on Sundays and to prayer-meeting Wednesday nights and drove about on my jobs with me. So did Murray's mother. He knows better."

So Hugh gave up the unequal contest and let himself be happy. He was happy—very. He was proud and glad. He loved Janet with a great, possessive tenderness. The mother of his child! The lovely, strong, straight, sane creature whom he, and nature working in him, had chosen to continue his stalwart race! Janet, the dear girl whom he loved!

And sometimes, when he lay between sleeping and waking, thoughts less blantly philoprogenitive hovered in the confines of his mind—humble, mysterious, tender thoughts.

But, after all, they had little time, either of them, for the mere contemplation of their situation and of their future. Hugh's working day, as the hospital progressed, was fourteen hours long, Janet's more than half of that. Both must have been longer but for

the simplicity and orderliness of her system. There was never a wasted moment, scarcely a wasted motion in the conduct of the business. The superintendents whom he had engaged for overseeing the various branches of construction seemed inspired with her accuracy and alertness. Drawings never had to go back to the architect for missing O. K.'s, specifications were exact, unmistakable. She was marvelous.

And then, into the midst of his admiring thoughts of her, the question would flash—how was it possible for a woman whose business methods were so excellent to be so hopeless a housekeeper? For Dagmar's successors had proved no more the forerunners of a domestic millennium than Dagmar herself.

One Sunday in June, he felt emboldened to speak to her about it. He had spoken often enough in the heat of annoyance, but their household failures had never been the theme of any calm discourse between them. This, however, was an exceptional day. They had promised each other that business should not intrude upon it. They had awakened late and had had a breakfast, actually palatable and even aesthetic, out upon the vine-screened piazza. They had gone afterward for a walk through a countryside at its freshest and most beautiful, all the greens still faintly silvery and golden, the apple trees not yet bare of blossoms, the gnarled lilac bushes not yet denuded of their weight of purple sweetness. The sunlight had been sparkling, the air cool. It was a jewel of a day, and they had walked along in perfect, idle content, too speechlessly satisfied with mere physical well-being to be aware of love, too deeply and entirely in love to be aware of the details of their well-being.

They had eaten their lunch—of sandwiches, cookies, and grape juice—beside an old bridge, stone-arched and

beautiful, that spanned a clear, narrow, winding little river. Like two contented animals, they had lain upon their backs, when they had fed, and half drowsed a little while in the sunlight, occasionally putting out their hands to feel each other near. And by and by they had walked home again, tossing off their seven return miles as easily as their seven miles out. They had gone down to Douglas Deering's and had sat a dutiful hour with him. Effie was away on a little holiday, and the brown cottage was in charge of one of those wonderful women whose secret whereabouts she still knew—one of those neighborly, nursing women who, quietly and with no crispness of starch, could come into a household and take all its cares upon her own broad shoulders. Then they had gone back home, entirely at peace with each other and with the world.

It was the incompetent's afternoon out. As they played about the kitchen, preparing their Sunday supper with the aid of two or three cook books, aprons, more utensils than Hugh had known the house possessed, and general gaiety, he became bold to touch upon the difficult topic. How, he wanted to know, did she account for the fact that she, who was so wonderfully efficient an office manager, should prove such a bungler at household management. She colored a little, and for a second he almost regretted her temerity; she was going to take it personally, after all.

But she didn't. He could see the quite palpable effort she made to put aside personal feeling and to consider it dispassionately, as if it were the case, the problem, of some one else.

"This isn't a *tu quoque*," she said, "but a real question: What kind of a household manager do you think you would make?"

"I dare say I'd make a pretty poor one," said Hugh. "I haven't been trained in household matters——"

"Neither have I. And not only have I not been trained in household matters, but I'm not able to find any assistants who have been. Down at the office, you draw upon trained people for your helpers. Some of them may not be very perfectly trained, but they've all done some kind of work by way of preparation for the work they do for you. Nobody considers that necessary with domestic servants. I think that explains my failures and my difficulties."

"Still," he objected, "not all housekeepers have quite so hard a time as you. Or it doesn't seem to me that they do."

She flushed more deeply. She was perfectly aware of the contrast that was in his mind. Beatrice, brought back to Berwickbury upon the sudden, dreadful ending of her wedding journey, had elected to spend the year of her conventional widowhood "at home." She had taken a house, busied herself in furnishing it charmingly, and now was running it on a scale of elegance unusual even among the wealthy of the city. Only last night they had dined with her, and the dinner had been exquisite, the service perfect, the reposeful elegance of the place apparent at every turn. Janet knew exactly what was in his mind. But she was trying to be reasonable. She was trying not to spoil the perfect day they had had together.

"Of course," she said, "if one has lots of money, one can get trained help—that is, help trained by other people, the graduates of service in other houses. But I haven't got lots of money. I have to take what offers itself through those hopeless agencies."

"Well, but there's Effie," he went on.

"Effie is a born and trained housekeeper." She was becoming a little restive now. "She loves her house. She loves her pantry shelves as I love my filing cabinet. She's as enthusiastic

over a new recipe for pudding as I am over the plans for a new building or the formula for a water-proof concrete."

"The toast is scorching," he told her.

It was quite true. In the heat and earnestness of her argument, she had entirely ceased to attend to the slices of bread browning upon some contrivance over the gas range. With an exclamation, she turned and snatched the scorched pieces from the stove.

"Don't you think," Hugh asked her, by and by, when they had finally achieved a very creditable meal and were eating it in the dining room, "that perhaps, if you'd been more domestically brought up—oh, I don't mean just you; I mean all you modern girls who never go into the kitchen from the kindergarten on—you might have cared for housekeeping things, too?"

"I don't believe," replied Janet with a decision that bordered slightly on asperity, "that I should ever have cared for anything as I do for being a cog in the building business. I might have liked architecture—I'm not sure about that—but I love what I do. Don't you think perhaps you would have loved snow-shoveling and coal-heaving, if you had been brought up to them, instead of what you were brought up to?" But she smiled at him across the table in a way that robbed the question of offense.

"It would be a joke on you, old lady," replied Hugh, "if you find out, when you lay off the first of August, that really the domestic game is worth the candle—better worth it than any other! I shouldn't be a bit surprised if you suffered a reversion to type, along with the coming of young Robert

"Young Ethelinda!"

"And became simply besotted over kitchen and nursery and the rest of it," predicted Hugh, ignoring the gauntlet flung down. Then he added more

thoughtfully: "You aren't going to try to get along with just that imbecile in the kitchen, are you?"

"No. Effie has unearthed me another one of her treasures—an 'accommodater,' she calls her. She's going to come and run the house for three months, though it's absolutely absurd and unnecessary, for I shall be well enough to go out scrubbing! The accommodater, Mrs. Wade, belongs to that good old-fashioned school that 'won't be bothered' with help in the kitchen. I'm to have a cleaning woman in once a week and a laundress, and for the rest, Mrs. Wade will attend to everything. I guess she thinks it rather absurd and extravagant for me to have a nurse engaged. She feels competent to manage the whole affair."

And then, discordantly breaking in upon their little talk, came a honking signal from in front of the house.

"Oh, damn!" It was Janet who uttered the expletive. She nodded her head violently as Hugh raised his eyebrows. "Yes, I meant it! I meant *damn*! I know it's Beatrice. I don't want to see her. Why can't she leave us alone?"

"Why, Jan!"

Hugh looked at her, astonished and a little dismayed. It was the first time that Janet had ever indicated any but hospitable and cousinly feelings toward the young widow.

"Oh, I didn't mean anything. Only we were having such a cozy time." The honking came again, and Janet pushed her husband toward the hall. "There, go out and bring her in!"

"I don't want her any more than you do," declared Hugh, still hesitating.

Janet stared at him in momentary astonishment.

"Why, it never occurred to me for a minute that you did!" she cried, and they stared at each other across a sudden deep gulf. For an instant their

eyes held each other. Then Hugh gave a little half-embarrassed laugh.

"I'll go out and get her. Perhaps she'd like some supper," and he disappeared from the room.

Janet continued to stare at the spot where he had stood.

CHAPTER XII.

"Janet not here?" Hugh looked in perplexity at Beatrice, lying back in a long chair among cushions brown and green and gold. "But I found a message on my desk, when I came in, saying that we were to come here for dinner—that I was to follow her here."

"Yes, I dare say you did. It was I who telephoned the message, when the operator there—you people are getting very important, by the way, aren't you, with your switchboards and all?—said that Janet had gone home for the day. I thought it would be rather nice to get you out here alone for a few minutes. I'll call Janet up by and by and tell her to come along for dinner. I wanted to see you."

She wore a frock of some thin white

They had eaten their lunch beside an old bridge, stone-arched and beautiful, that spanned a clear, narrow, little river.



stuff, the name of which he did not know. He only knew that it was very sheer, white, and crêpy. Long earrings of dull jet dangled from her ears. A chain of carved ebony beads passed twice around her neck and fell into her lap. Her little black head was as sleek and shining as ever. She was quite outrageously painted; nevertheless, she somehow succeeded in escaping vulgarity. Her artificiality was so frank that it seemed a waste of effort to call it by harsh names.

"I'm always at your service—you know that," Hugh replied, but rather stiffly.

"Oh, no, you're not! If you were, I shouldn't have to resort to tricks like this to get you here. Hugh"—she sat up and leaned toward him, facing him with an earnestness he had never seen in her greenish eyes before—"aren't we friends? Didn't you promise to forgive me and to be my friend that night out at Oakwood when we—when I"—she sighed, and her lips set themselves in a line of bitterness—"broke it all off?"

"But we are friends. I had nothing to forgive. That was immediately apparent," Hugh answered, striving in vain for an easy, light touch.

"Yes, it was immediately apparent that you had nothing to forgive. You had fallen in love with Janet. You owed me a vote of thanks for breaking off our silly, dear little engagement. Oh, don't look so uncomfortable, man! Why don't you give yourself a vacation from your proprieties and be honest? It was a dear little engagement! You know it was! There wasn't one shred of duty or boredom mixed up with it, now was there?"

"There certainly wasn't any boredom connected with it," Hugh laughed, yielding himself to her mood. He reached toward a silver box on the table. "May I have a cigarette?"

"Yes, do. How do you like them—their looks, I mean? Isn't that mono-

gram all that a grieving widow's should be—lavender? And the gold tip is so pale that it looks silver. Very chaste, I call it."

"Very neat indeed," he commended. "Hadh't you better call up Janet? She'll be making preparations for dinner at home——"

"Bless the man! He's as nervous as a boy whose mother has told him to come in at five o'clock. No, I'll send the car and a note down to her by Jeffries. He's my new chauffeur—straight from the Duchess of Something-or-other. But he can't overpower me! Do you remember Mrs. Brandywine, Hugh?"

"Indeed I do. You knew how to put her in her place."

"That was the day we first met," said Beatrice, looking at him with half-closed eyes. She was smoking one of her mourning cigarettes, and she allowed a little veil to hover between them for a moment.

"So it was," said Hugh, somewhat woodenly.

"Well," she cried with sudden impatience, "you aren't sorry we met, are you? Even if you are a husband, can't you be a human being?"

He looked at her, lying back among her cushions, the smoke weaving its vague pattern about her head, the beautiful room cool and rather dim behind her. He could not quite resist the intoxication of it, any more than his nostrils could altogether have evaded the aroma of the cigarettes.

"Oh, I'm enough of a human being, I think." He spoke with a drawl.

"I'm not at all sure of it. Just because we were once in love with each other—— We *were* in love, weren't we?"

"You made me doubt it, Beatrice," he replied. It was impossible to avoid playing up to her lead!

"You never doubted it until you came back to this dreadful place, where

everything spontaneous and gay seems unlikely—mythical almost! You never doubted it as long as you stayed in New York, did you?"

"I was obliged to doubt it, the night you told me you had discovered that you were mistaken in your feelings. There was nothing else for me to do, was there?"

"I told you," she said, with an appearance of earnestness, "that I had been mistaken in one of my feelings. I told you that I found it was not, after all, big and fine enough to make me endure the sort of semipoverty we would have to live in. I never said anything about having mistaken my feeling for you *per se*. It was only my feeling for you in comparison with my feeling for comfort—luxury——"

"Still, a fellow can't feel that he's very devotedly loved if he can't hold his own against a limousine," Hugh struck in. He spoke without anger, with some amusement, indeed. "Come, dear Cousin Beatrice, why the post-mortem? We're the best of friends. I hope you don't doubt it. There's nothing that I—that Janet and I"—he corrected himself quickly—"wouldn't do to prove our friendship."

"Oh, of course I know it!" Beatrice sighed and rose from her chair. "I'm a sensible woman, really, Hugh, even if I do seem to have a natural taste for playing the fool occasionally. Well, I'll write my note to Janet and send it along. Don't tell her, will you, that I got you here under false pretenses, just to have a few minutes alone with you?" She paused beside his chair.

"Of course I shan't. If I did, Jan wouldn't believe me. She couldn't imagine any one's caring enough about my society."

He had only meant to be light, cool, indifferent, and modest, but he heard the words as a reflection upon Janet's love for him. Beatrice stood a second longer beside his chair; he breathed the

perfume of violets; he felt, he thought, the soft contact of a floating bit of silk. He was entirely aware of what she was trying to do. The trouble was that she was succeeding. It was with difficulty that he kept his hands employed with the lighting of a fresh cigarette. They wanted, those hands of his, in which his will and his desire had no part, to reach out, to capture hers, to draw her down—— What a beast he was!

With that final salutary reflection, he looked up at her and shook his red head, laughing.

"Go on and write that note, Beatrice," he commanded her, "and don't stand there trying to make a fool of your Uncle Dudley!"

She did not deny the implication of his words, but accepted it with a laugh and passed on to the desk against the wall.

"You think I'm a Circe or a devil or some kind of a temptress, don't you?" she remarked, as she seated herself and took a sheet of embossed stationery from its pigeonhole. "Well, you know, I shouldn't half dislike being one—only I'm not. I'm too hard *au fond*, I suppose. It isn't a New England conscience, you understand—it's New England common sense and thrift. I've never been able to figure out that the ultimate destiny of the devilish female is quite worth the pains she takes to achieve it. I won't try to flirt with you any more, Hugh. Only—be friendly. I—I don't want to press the soft pedal unduly, but, you know, I've had a sort of hard time. I'm a bit lonely. And there's no one quite so close to me as you."

"You poor kid, you!"

He crossed the room to her. It was pleasant to let down his guards. It was pleasant to be human and kindly. After all, she had had a rotten deal! She must have had some sort of affection for old Creamer to be willing to

marry him—and then to lose him so shockingly! It must have shaken her up horribly. What was the use of holding her at arm's length in this way, as if she were indeed the temptress of all time and he some stupid saint rebuffing her from a pillar?

Still, he had not intended to kiss her!

That danger, he had thought, was past, that temptation overcome, that vagrant desire relegated to the chamber of being where vagrant desires are kept decently under lock and key. And yet, when he had put away the thought, when he had served notice upon her that he had no intention of playing her game with her, when he had, as he supposed, reduced her to reason—here he was, with his pulse pounding in his wrists and her kiss upon his lips!

Treacherous, underhanded temptation, to pretend to be in full retreat, only to turn and undo him the more effectively!

He stood erect and glared down upon her.

"See here, Beatrice, I'm a swine! Forgive me. I had no intention of doing that——"

"I know you hadn't, Hugh." Was there forgiveness or triumph or mockery in her voice?

"And I'm ashamed of myself."

"Oh, it was my fault, too. I oughtn't to have appealed to you for kindness. Let's forget all about it."

"It must never happen again," declared Hugh firmly.

"Never!" cried Beatrice emphatically.

Her eyes were shining, her bent-back head left her long white throat beautiful and bare. It must never happen again, of course—but he wanted to kiss that lily stem of a throat. He ground his nails into his palms and turned on his heel.

"I'm going out on the terrace, here, until you've written your note," he said.

His voice sounded muffled to his own ears. He stepped out through the French window. He was glad to be in a world of sunlight again, outside that dim, cool, sweet room, with its faintly smothering scent of flowers and its dim, misleading, provocative lights. Out-of-doors was like Janet. He fixed his thought upon her as a shipwrecked Italian sailor might fix his thoughts upon a saint, in a desperate clutch after safety. He did not go into the house again until the car came back with Janet. Instead, with a tolerable imitation of ease and lightness, he had bidden Beatrice come out upon the terrace with him.

CHAPTER XIII.

Janet, Lottie, and Effie were together on the porch, hidden by the thick screen of honeysuckle from sight of such part of Berwickbury as might pass. The heat of the mid-August afternoon was stifling. In a tall glass pitcher on the table beside them was iced tea. It had been brought out, unsolicited, by the incomparable Mrs. Wade, installed now for two weeks in the proud post of "accommodator." The young women had drunk of it greedily. Not only was the day unbearably hot, but all the world was feverishly excited. Ten days before, Austria had served notice upon Serbia that she must, in effect, surrender her sovereignty, or suffer the consequences. The consequences were blazing already in Europe and threatening a greater conflagration yet. The stupendous horror of it, the stupendous amazement of it, still dwarfed every other emotion. It was unbelievable—but it was true! It must end within a few months; unthinkable that sheer madness should run amuck for long. Yet each day brought news that meant the prolongation of the war.

Janet, still very well, had kept her promise of giving up work at the beginning of August. She had declared her

intention of returning when the baby was two months old, and Hugh, Doctor Murray, and Effie had all smiled knowingly and had thought it perfectly safe to defer decision. Janet, secure in her own determination, understood and resented their attitude. How ruled all of them were by tradition! What power words had over them—a power greater than realities! But she, too, was willing to defer decision. She did not want to spoil the peace of these days.

They were very delightful ones, except for that awful figure of red ruin stalking the lands across the sea. For almost the first time since her marriage, her house was as neat as the proverbial new pin. Effie, assisted by no less discriminating a buyer than Beatrice, had purchased the layette. Hugh was all pride and tender devotion. There was, indeed, a new quality in his ardor that touched Janet profoundly. It seemed humbler, deeper, more eager, more impregnated with the desire to serve her. She read it all as his dear, sentimental, and altogether characteristic and adorable tribute to the woman whom he loved who was about to bear him a child.

On this particular afternoon, the girls, when they had finished their tea and had read the latest extra that an enterprising newsboy had brought out through the quiet street, fell to talking of some of the other girls who had been members of Janet's club in the days when she had "gone in" for philanthropy. Most of them were working in the factories. Why, Janet wanted to know, after the perennial habit of the harried housekeeper, was none of them willing to learn to do housework well and to go into that better-paid branch of industry.

Lottie rather defended her friends. Of course, she admitted, all that Mrs. Deering said about comfort and health and the ability to save was perfectly

true. But, put it how one might, household service was not dignified. A girl lost caste by it. Moreover, she lost freedom. And caste and freedom, Lottie intimated, were greatly desirable possessions, ranking above comfortable, sanitary surroundings and an increasing balance at the savings bank.

"If somehow," she said vaguely, "you could make housework like office work or factory work, it would be different. If a girl could go for so many hours a day, and not have the mistress think she belonged to her, body and soul— Oh, I don't know, but somehow I should think it might be different."

"Do all the girls we were talking about live at home?" asked Janet.

"No, only two or three of them. The others live in boarding houses or rooming houses. There're awfully few good places down near the mills, too. The girls make good wages, but by the time they pay for their room and food, for their washing and their clothes and a little amusement, I tell you, there isn't much left. Sometimes I've thought"—she broke off and gave an embarrassed laugh—"sometimes I've thought about going into business myself."

"Letting rooms?"

"No. But Tim and I have talked about it, really. I don't know as we want to keep on with the saloon. Of course Tim's place has always been nice and orderly, but when you have a baby, things look sort of different. So I've talked to him about running—not a restaurant, for we couldn't be bothered with the waiting and the dish-washing and all that—but a kind of a hot-dinner-supply place. Say you were a woman working in the mills and either lodging by yourself somewhere or going home to your own tenement at night. Wouldn't it be sort of nice if you could stop somewhere and get a pot of hot, thick soup, or maybe of

stew, or baked beans, or something substantial, and take it home with you in some kind of a thing like a thermos bottle so it wouldn't be cold when you got home? There you'd be with your main hot dish all ready—no fires to light, no cooking to do—I bet you some day somebody will start that thing, and then Tim and I will be so mad because we didn't!"

"Of course, you know, Lottie," said Effie sweetly, "if the world were properly run, women wouldn't have to work out of their homes at all."

"Maybe they wouldn't, Miss Effie. I don't know about that, but the world's been running wrong such a long time! I guess we've sort of got to see how to make the best of it as it is. Besides," she added thoughtfully, "I've never quite been able to work it out in my own mind. You know most of the young fellows that get married would never think, before they were married, that they could afford to keep a servant all to themselves. Well, they get married, and that's what they set out to do. Of course they don't call it that. But it seems to me that's what it amounts to."

"Bravo, Lottie!" cried Janet, laughing. "You're expressed in words of one syllable the most advanced feminist doctrine!"

The gate at the end of the yard clicked, and she parted the honeysuckle leaves to look down the path. Almeric Stanton was coming up. Effie saw him at the same moment and jumped to her feet, blushing a little.

"I've got to go," she cried, a little breathlessly. "I've been away from father so long."

And in the little confusion of greeting, she made her escape, Lottie, the newly discovered apostle of feminism, departing embarrassedly with her. Young Stanton looked after Effie with vague regret. He thought her very sweet, very appealing. She touched his

fancy. He wished she wouldn't run away whenever he came in sight; she hadn't used to do that six months ago. He wondered why she had changed.

But, after all, he did not wonder about it long. Janet, that splendid, vital woman, was just now absorbingly interesting to him. He had always been fond of women, though seldom amorously so. He had gained a lot from them, without, as he admitted, paying any great price in emotion for his gains. However, they had seldom wasted emotion on him, either. As individuals, they had never "hit him very hard," as he expressed it, but as types they commanded his deepest interest. Janet was a type new to him. He had, to be sure, met advanced women before, who claimed all the world of labor for their own, but these had never happened to be young, beautiful, radiantly happy women. And, besides being a new type to him, she was stimulating to his creative imagination.

He rather despised Hugh, not as a builder—far from that!—but as a man. His seemed to Almeric Stanton the most ordinary sort of personality—unimaginative, energetic, good-humored, with the good humor of the eupeptic, humorous after the easy style of the schoolboy or the comic paper, probably easily stirred in his emotions, but with his appetites kept decorously under by the inherited habit of his Scotch race. A very good fellow, of course, but to waste this wonderful creature upon him!

The wonderful creature greeted him with more than her usual cordiality.

"My callers have just left me a great idea," she declared, "or one of them has. Do you remember what we talked about the day of Beatrice's wedding? Poor Beatrice!" She paid the tribute of a perfunctory sigh to her cousin's widowhood, and went on. "About the architect, I mean, being the solver, ultimately, of the whole woman-im-

industry problem? Well, Lottie Finch—she's the wife of a saloon keeper down in the mill district—has just given me a notion of where the movement should begin. In housing the mill employees. What do you think about it?"

"I've just won the competition for the public-library building in Dayton," he told her. "I've come to be congratulated and to rest on my laurels, not to be put to work."

She started a little and gave him a curious glance. There had never been the slightest touch of personal feeling



He saw Stanton's smooth, dark head bent beside his wife's over a drawing on the table. He was suddenly angry at the sight.

"Yes, that's very nice, and I'm awfully glad. But, after all, a library doesn't present a tremendous amount of room for novelty and experiment, does it? They had libraries in Greece and Rome, I suppose. I know they must have had one in Alexandria, because my history told me it was burned! But mills and mill communities—Doesn't the possibility thrill you?"

"When you talk about them," he replied.

in her regard for him, nor had she ever detected the slightest personal note in his manner to her. And in spite of the emphasis of his last words, his manner was impersonal enough now.

"Oh!" She spoke a little awkwardly, with a certain displeasure. "Do you mean you don't really care about these things of which we talk—that it's only another way of passing the time? I'm sorry—I thought—"

"I didn't mean anything more objectionable than that I'm a lazy dog whose imagination seems to need constant

stimulation. It gets it, for all this modern stuff, from you more than it has ever got it from any one else, Mrs. Deering. But I sometimes suspect my talent of not being very robust. It doesn't go along new lines by itself very energetically."

She shook off her momentary blankness and dismay.

"After all," she said, "you only mean that you're not always at fever heat. But I do wish I could inflame you, permanently, with my convictions on the subject of these mill communities. Some things have been done, I suppose——"

"Oh, yes! Port Sunlight and Hope-
dale and a lot of other places have been efforts to solve the housing and living problems of a factory community. I dare say we'll work out something, by and by. Tell me some more, if you will, of what your friend, Mrs. Finch, was saying."

She launched into an eager disquisition, for which Lottie's remarks served as the theme. Gradually, as always was the case, his constructive fancy began to catch fire from the clear blaze of hers. They were making rough calculations on a pad when, by and by, Hugh came soberly up the path.

He had approached his home very slowly, although, once in sight of it, he had walked more springily, had assumed, for a second, a look of eagerness toward the porch. The truth was that he was deeply dissatisfied with himself. He was coming home to Janet—to Janet, his wonderful wife, the dear girl whom he loved with a final, steadfast affection beyond all shadow of doubt—and yet he was coming weighed down by a secret sense of wrong toward her. There was she who had given him all precious gifts—love and gladness, comradeship and service, the highest, holiest romance of his life; there was she who, in a little time now, was to go down into the very valley of

the shadow of death that she might enrich his life yet further. And here was he coming from a meeting with Beatrice.

Oh, he had not sought it! Since that one experience of his own despicable weakness—thus he named it to himself—he had been careful to avoid opportunities for folly. He had never gone into the beautiful, sumptuous dwelling, one of whose chief attributes was a subtle allurements, except with Janet protectingly by his side. But since the first of August had come and Gregg had taken Janet's place in the office—as well as a blundering ass like Gregg could take it!—Beatrice had had a habit of dropping in late in the afternoon.

She was experimenting with motor cars. The incomparable Jeffries, who had been a chauffeur to the Duchess of Something-or-other, still drove for her—when she allowed it. But she had learned to drive herself, and she was generally to be seen alone going out toward the country club or returning from it between five and six in the afternoon. There was nothing especially baleful in the fact that she should stop now and then in front of Hugh's office and should offer to drive him home. Sometimes he had evaded her hospitality by pointing to the runabout waiting for his hand upon the wheel; but often the runabout, with some young superintendent in it, was out at the State hospital or off at Sands Point, where Douglas Deering, Inc., was building a summer hotel. On certain of these occasions, he had fallen prey to Beatrice.

It was futile for him to tell himself that nothing happened on those rides to which Janet could possibly have taken exception. Beatrice, mocking, provocative, had failed to catch him un-
aware again. Her green eyes dared him, her red lips laughed at him, but he steeled himself against the challenge

and looked at her with amused defiance—at any rate, that was how he hoped he seemed to look at her. Surely there was nothing to which Janet could take exception! And yet he went slowly up the path toward his wife that night because his feet were weighted, his heart was heavy, with a subtle sense of disloyalty.

He loved only Janet in all the world, and he worshiped her—upon that he would stake his very existence. Yet fifteen minutes before, he had been seated beside another woman, and he had been enjoying the sensation with which she filled him—the desire of his arm to infold her slim shoulder, the desire of his lips to taste again the spiced sweetness of hers. If only they had never been engaged to each other! If only he did not know, in every nerve, the tingling intoxication her caresses could bestow, cold, selfish, and heartless as he believed her to be, fundamentally indifferent to her as he knew himself to be.

As he approached the steps, he saw Stanton's smooth, dark head bent beside his wife's over a drawing on the table. He was suddenly angry at the sight. Then he realized that it was Beatrice's lifted eyebrow at the conjunction of their names, the other day, that gave him that anger now.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I wish you wouldn't do it, Janet." Hugh's voice was very much that of a lord and master.

"But why?"

Janet was painstakingly reasonable.

They were speaking at the breakfast table—such a different breakfast table from that set forth by Dagmar and her immediate followers!—and Janet had just finished reading her letters, one of them aloud.

"You give up work at the office in order to take proper care of yourself," Hugh expounded the situation, "and

that's all very well. You have a good woman in to relieve you of work at home, for the same reason—in order that you may take proper care of yourself. It seems a little absurd that, having arranged your entire life for these two months so that you might be free to rest, you should get yourself mixed up with an undertaking of that sort."

"I'm as strong as an ox, Hugh. What evidence do I need to produce to convince you of it? I'm simply wonderfully well. If I'm not at the office and if I've got a Mrs. Wade here for a fabulous sum, that's only out of deference to your old-fashioned notions. I'm not going to get myself involved in this thing, particularly. But Lottie Finch was talking to me about it only a couple of weeks ago. I think it's an awfully sensible plan. I want to see the house down near the Cheney Brass Works that she thinks would do. Please be nice, Hugh. Remember that the girl hasn't any one to advise her—any one of our sort, I mean—disinterested, honest, anxious to help."

"You'll go down there, and the first thing you know you'll be organizing the whole affair."

"I promise you I won't. But I certainly ought to be able to give her some advice. It wouldn't do me the least harm, even if I undertook the awful task of finding out the price of vacuum food containers, or the cost of printing five thousand hand bills advertising a hot-dinner venture. I get bored stiff, sitting here, sometimes."

"That seems rather odd language from an expectant mother," observed Hugh.

Janet flashed an impatient glance at him.

"You're an expectant father, you know," she reminded him. "How would you like to spend fifteen hours a day thinking about it?"

"Oh, have your own way! You will anyhow."

"I don't think that's quite fair, Hugh," she answered him.

There was a lump in her throat and the pressure of tears against her eyeballs. Superbly well as she was, she had these moments of hypersensitive-ness.

"I didn't mean to be unfair, Janey."

Hugh was suddenly penitent. Dimly he realized that his fault-finding was, as it were, an effort to "square" himself—the inevitable effort of a person conscious of wrong-doing to find something blameworthy outside his own conduct. Janet's nerves vanished at the new tone.

"You aren't unfair, Hugh. I guess I'm a pretty difficult person these days. But Ethelinda——"

"Robert!"

They both laughed. Janet went on with her interrupted sentence:

"Will change all that. And you don't really mind my going down, do you?"

"I won't go so far as to say I don't mind, but I don't withhold my lordly permission," answered Hugh.

Again they both laughed.

"Your lordly grandmother!" scoffed Janet inelegantly.

He came around the table to kiss her good-by. He held her face between his hands and looked at it hungrily for a second or two. He impressed it all upon his heart, a talisman against evil—the broad, serene forehead, the gray eyes, clear and shining, the satiny-textured skin, glowing with health. Purity, vigor, intelligence, fortitude—all these were there. He loved them, he loved her. Never again would he permit himself any vagrant sensation of the blood.

Early that afternoon, he was oppressed by some foreboding of disaster. It was easy to account for it on purely matter-of-fact grounds. Gregg did not run the business of the office as Janet had run it. There had been half a dozen annoying delays in obtaining in-

formation that morning; there had been one or two blunders in correspondence; there had been the failure of a firm of masons to obey specifications in regard to mortar; there had been a perfectly palpable effort on the part of one Mr. Bernard Ryan's henchmen, a subcontractor, to bribe him. There was ample reason for his jangled nerves, but he chose to interpret them as prophetic rather than historic. He called Janet up and asked her not to go, after all, with Lottie Finch down to inspect the building near the Cheney Brass Works.

Janet was, not unnaturally, irritated at the request. She was feeling perfectly well. She had already telephoned Lottie that she would meet her at the end of the car line. Of course she was going!

She went, but a little heavy-heartedly. Strangely blending with her self-will, with her ingrained resolution to act always as an individual, as Janet Deering, and never as a mere appendage to any one, there was a strain of maternal indulgence toward Hugh. She hated to deny him things—even things that she knew, in her wisdom, it was bad for him to have, like his own way. So she went to meet Lottie, but not quite so joyously as she had expected. Her mind, instead of leaping forward toward Lottie's budding enterprise, kept circling around the relation existing between herself and Hugh. Oh, well, the first two years of married life were proverbially difficult. They would work out into a better union, a more complete comradeship, a finer freedom, in which neither one nor the other would be forever seeking to impose restraints, to hamper, to bind.

She found Lottie at the end of the car line, very much excited at the possibility of putting into execution the plan she had had. It seemed that a most unpleasant, unsavory—almost fatal—episode in Tim's saloon three or

four nights ago had crystallized into an immediate possibility what had seemed only a nebulous dream for the future.

"It seems almost like it was impossible to keep a thoroughly respectable, high-class saloon, Mrs. Deering," Lottie confided to her, after she had narrated the events that had broken down Tim's last opposition. "Just think of it—after all these years—the very first time there's ever been police called in! And Tim'll have to appear to testify. Of course it might happen to any one. You read in the paper about all sorts of rich men and senators and things being called as witnesses. But that ain't like the police court. It wouldn't matter so much if it weren't for baby. It certainly was awfully good of you, Mrs. Deering, to come down with me to see this place. You always were a good friend to me."

The Cheney Brass Works occupied a semicircle of hideous brick buildings, all opening upon a brick-walled court. Opposite to this, immediately in front of the very gate by which the mill hands left the plant each night, was the vacant house the possibilities of which Lottie wished to investigate. It had been a mill hands' lodging house with a restaurant attached to it. Lottie had stopped at the agent's and had obtained the key. The two young women entered and went at once back into the kitchen.

"Two ranges," observed Lottie, nodding. "Gas and coal. The coal seems in pretty good condition, doesn't it, Mrs. Deering?"

"I don't know much about ranges," confessed, Janet. "You'd want new sinks. These are horrid, rusty old things. Enameled ones with rounded corners would soon pay for themselves. I wonder if you couldn't cut another window up above that built-in cupboard. The room's pretty dark."

"We'd have to go slow in the beginning; Tim hasn't got as much laid

aside as you'd think. The breweries always see to that! But——"

There came a deafening intonation—a horrible, unbelievable noise, as if all the thunderstorms that had ever been since primeval chaos had been gathered into one mighty storm, breaking now around them. The glass from the windows fell inward upon them, shattered. The room seemed, for a second, to be upheaving as if in an earthquake. The two women, thrown against the wall by the shock, groped their way toward each other and clung together, blanched and wide-eyed with terror. Another secondary explosion followed, not so violent as the first. But it forced them to their knees.

They did not know how long it was before they found voice enough to ask each other: "What was it? What was it?" They did not know how long it was before they ventured to creep back toward the street. It seemed hours that they had been in that dingy, dirty, dismantled room while the Day of Judgment crashed outside. But it was probably only a few seconds before they were crawling over a mass of debris in front of the house.

Already the Cheney Brass Works, though the world war was still young, had begun to manufacture munitions. Already the mysterious explosions, so many of which were to follow in the months to come, had begun. Fire broke forth in one of the buildings of the plant and added its horror. Policemen, fire engines, ambulances, all were crowding into the narrow street outside the brick courtyard.

It seemed to Janet hours before she was able to make her way through the panic-stricken crowd of mill hands, three-quarters of them foreigners, and reach a telephone from which to reassure Hugh as to her safety. He was not in the office, but she left a message saying that she was all right and that she had gone home.

She felt horribly faint and dizzy as she fought through the crowd back toward the resident section of the town. The street cars were not running and she was not able to get a taxi. Lottie had left her to make her way to her own section of the city. With every step that she took, she felt weaker and weaker. Fright followed close at her shoulder, too. Never, she knew, would she cease to hear that horrible, deafening sound. Never would she cease to see that scene of hideous chaos.

After a while, she sighted a motor car proceeding along in a leisurely way as if explosions and fires were unknown. She signaled the astonished chauffeur.

"You must take me home," she told him when he drew up respectfully beside the sidewalk. "I'm Mrs. Hugh Deering—I live—"

Her voice failed. She swayed. The man sprang from his seat and lifted her into the tonneau. Her head sank backward; her eyes closed; the last vestige of color left her lips. He looked frantically around for help. None was in sight. He sprang back to his seat and drove desperately toward the Emergency Hospital. He had not the dimmest notion who Mrs. Hugh Deering was or where she lived.

That night, in agony and in peril, Janet's child was born prematurely, and died before it had drawn more than one quivering breath.

CHAPTER XV.

She had been back home for a month. It was early December. The weary lassitude, the desperate, deep-seated sense of utter futility that had accompanied her convalescence, had very slightly lifted. There stirred again within her little beginnings of energy. She thought she would like to go back to the office.

Hugh, of course, opposed her. The "of course" was her half-bitter thought

of him. He had been awfully cut up, poor fellow—she admitted that. He had been full of tender anxiety about her and of tender sympathy with her. But not all his love, not all his devotion, had sufficed to keep him from showing her that he felt the catastrophe to have been due to her own willfulness. He had not said so; it was the sort of thing that no man of gentle mind could say to a woman who had been through such anguish of experience as Janet had undergone. But she knew it, and sometimes she held imaginary conversations with him about it.

"You say that if I hadn't gone down there that afternoon," thus her imaginary speech to him ran, "I wouldn't have undergone that shock, and everything would have been different. Perhaps that's true. And perhaps, if the world had not gone mad with war, and the factory had not been making munitions, the explosion wouldn't have happened. And perhaps if I'd been allowed to do as I pleased and stay at the office until my leaving was really necessary, I shouldn't have been there when the explosion happened. You have no more right to blame me for it than I have to blame you. And, after all, I've been the one to suffer the most. You would have liked your child—you would have been proud to be a father; but I had been carrying the baby against my heart all those months. You don't know anything at all about it."

But High, kind, forbearing—palpably kind and forbearing—gave her no opening for such a speech as this.

He was firm, however, in his refusal to allow her to return to the office. She was not well enough, he declared. Oh, yes, of course they missed her, of course they needed her, but Gregg was working out better than had once seemed possible. She mustn't consider returning before the first of the year, if then.

She had not the energy to combat his decision very vigorously. She felt it unjust, she felt it mistaken, but she knew that to argue the question would only reduce her to those tears which came so easily nowadays. By and by, when she was a little stronger, she would make a real fight. Not now.

But what was she to do now? The "accommodater" had remained, had become a permanency, had told Janet not to worry about her leaving; she would stay as long as they needed her! It was awfully expensive, having the "accommodater," and of course Gregg was costing the firm more than she had cost it. However, she must not worry; she must only try to get well. It was, she told herself, only because she was still weak and nervous, because her grief had a touch of morbidity, that she should have this dreadful, forlorn feeling, this impression that her good, kind Hugh no longer really loved her, but only forgave her for losing his child. It was morbidity. If only she could get her mind interested in something! If only she could employ all those wasted hours of the day when she sat or lay in her room, and thought of what the little child might have been



She felt horribly faint and dizzy. Never, she knew, would she cease to hear that horrible, deafening sound.

to her and Hugh, and fell into uneasy dozes from which she waked with dreadful starts, hearing again in her dream that awful crash of doom.

Effie was very faithful, and, curiously enough, Almeric Stanton was faithful. That astonished her a little. She had thought of him as rather a cold individual, of intellectual sympathies, but no human warmth of heart. Yet now, though she had nothing to offer him of mental stimulation, he was always coming over from Hartford and dropping in to see her for an hour

or two. He brought her books; he insisted upon talking plans with her. When she shuddered away from all mention of that Utopian mill city that he was to build, he brought her back to it resolutely. He would not let her be morbid about the affair. He and Effie seemed to form a federation for the purpose of overcoming her melancholy and bringing her back to everyday.

They were more successful in their endeavors than was Hugh, but that was not remarkable. Between her and Hugh there lay, however unjustly, the shadow of a wrong. Neither would acknowledge it, and both, indeed, knew that it was not a real thing. Yet some day they would have to open the windows upon it. Until then, they would walk in this dull estrangement.

On this particular afternoon, she was much at a loss for occupation. Her returning energies craved an outlet, but there was nothing in particular to do. She thought she would go out and buy Hugh's Christmas present. It was well to be forehanded, and, besides, Doctor Murray had told her to walk every day, and she could not bring herself to obey him except by manufacturing an errand. That old buoyant delight in walking for walking's sake seemed to be gone from her.

What would Hugh like, she wondered. Her lip quivered, in spite of her efforts at self-control, when she got out among the stores. The toys, the foolish rubber animals, the bright-colored balls—without being herself aware of it, she had been picturing a Christmas gay with all these things! And now— Oh, well, she must not brood. She must get hold of herself!

She prowled in a book store for a while. Berwickbury had claims to culture and maintained an excellent book shop. For a while she forgot herself in dipping into new volumes. She would get this one on birds for Effie.

Effie, quaint child, had a passion for birds! She was a sort of little sister of St. Francis about them.

That volume of French memoirs would do for Beatrice. It was very beautifully bound, beautifully printed, and it seemed to be a sprightly and somewhat salacious narrative of events in the reign of some old roué or another! And thinking of Beatrice, she had never been up there since her illness! Her cousin had been all that was kind and attentive during those wearing weeks in the hospital, coming with flowers and fruits and characteristic frivolities of gossip and philosophy almost every day after Janet had been permitted to see any one. She would go up now to Beatrice's and would have tea with her. Of course, Beatrice was a thoroughly unscrupulous person, but why need she, Janet, take a stand about that? Beatrice was always amusing, and she was inclined to think that amusement was what she most needed.

The decision brought energy with it. She enjoyed the walk up the hill to Beatrice's pretty house. A soft, reluctant snow began to fall. It melted as it struck the pavements, but it dressed the world in a haze of delicacy and charm. She was glad that she had come out. Doctor Murray had been right. She must walk every day.

Mrs. Creamer was not at home? She was expected, however, for tea? Mrs. Deering would come in and wait. The smiling maid, who remembered her as an occasional visitor in the late summer and who knew of her illness, ushered her into the library, established her among cushions, put a fresh log upon the fire, half surrounded her with a Chinese screen against the draft, petted her generally, and gave her a pampered feeling that was rather agreeable.

The little walk in the snow had tired her. The heat of the fire was soporific. She closed her eyes—to rest them.

By and by, she opened them again. She must have fallen asleep! There were voices on the other side of the screen. Drowsily she recognized them. That was Hugh's.

"You maddening little witch, you insistent little devil, you will have your own way, will you? Then—have it!"

There was the sound of a kiss, of a strangled cry and a laugh. There was a moment of breathlessness; then Beatrice's voice, half-smothered:

"There's really no need to be an ogre, you know, Hugh!"

Janet dragged herself up from among the cushions. She scarcely knew what she was doing. She recognized the significance of the sounds and the words, but they did not seem to be significant for her, only for the other two. She moved from behind the screen and came upon her husband and her cousin on the other side of it. His arms folded her tightly to him, her head was bent backward for his rough kisses.

CHAPTER XVI.

Almeric Stanton looked up from his work with a slight frown.

"The lady refuses to give her name and says it's not about business, so not to hurry? Is that the message, Hodge?"

He repeated the unusual announcement of the office boy with an inflection of disapproval.

"She said she'd rather not," explained Hodge, in regard to the namelessness of the caller.

"Well." He hesitated. His acquaintance was limited among ladies of the sort liable to have reasons for concealing their names. "Well, I'll come out in a few minutes," he conceded finally, and went back to the letter on his desk.

He allowed a sufficient interval to pass to impress his unknown caller with the fact that he was not one to be

easily summoned to mysterious conferences. Then he passed through the long, bright drafting department and the adjoining cubby-hole of an office into his chastely furnished reception room, with pictures of his completed buildings vying with the Notre Dame and the Cathedral at Chartres on the walls, with the wide fireplace, the blue and crimson leather of bindings showing discreetly on glass inclosed shelves, the curtains that subtly repeated the color tone of the walls. A very excellent example of what a successful young architect's reception room should be was that of Mr. Almeric Stanton, now resident of New York for more than a year.

At one side of a long dull-oak table that seemed meant for directors' meetings, a slight figure was lost in a wide chair. As Stanton closed the door behind him and advanced, the eyes attached to the figure were raised from the magazine with which they had been perfunctorily occupied, and Effie Deering looked at him.

"Miss Deering! Miss Effie!" There was surprise and a touch of apologetic delight in his voice. "I'm so sorry I kept you waiting! I—I never guessed it could be you! Why didn't you send in your name? Why didn't you telephone and let me know you were in town? Why didn't you let me come to you? Why didn't you answer my notes a year and more ago?"

He stopped for breath.

Effie's eyes, shadowed and a little weary, brightened at the enthusiasm of his welcome.

"I didn't know you'd be so glad to see me," she said naively. "So kind, I mean."

"Kind!" He dismissed the idea with a laugh. "But let me look at you. You—are you well? Very well? As well as you should be?"

"Oh, I'm all right," replied Effie.

"It's my mourning makes me look—different," she added in explanation.

"Your mourning? To be sure. I didn't notice at first. I—I hadn't heard of any loss. I'm so sorry. It was your——"

"My father. Six months ago. He—he had a slight relapse, a second slight stroke, you know—or I dare say you don't know—when—when Janet left Hugh, and a third a year later, and that—that was the end."

"I'm so sorry." His voice was gentle; his eyes, studying the worn delicacy of the girl's face, were full of kindness. "I'm sorry I knew nothing of it. I—— There might have been something that a friend could have done for you, and I should have liked to be that friend."

"There was nothing. Besides, you were abroad when the end came."

Then she blushed in mortification, annoyed that she had revealed her knowledge of his movements.

"Yes, I was away for three months in the early winter. But—you wanted to see me about something special, Miss Effie? What is it? I hope"—he spoke lightly, but with a certain degree of sincerity—"that you aren't going to tell me you're going to be married to a munitions-making millionaire and want a paradisaical palace designed for you?"

"No." She smiled faintly. "I told the boy to say that it was not business, so if you couldn't give me the time now, you might send me away——"

"Hardly! But if it isn't business, what is it?"

"Mr. Stanton, do you know where Janet is?" There had been a second's pause before she asked it, as if she were gathering strength for a spring.

"Why, yes. Don't you?"

"No, neither I nor my brother. I—I—oh, I'm broken-hearted about it all! I want to see her! I want to tell her about Hugh! I—I——"

She fumbled with the clasp of her

black silk bag, looking for a handkerchief. Tears threatened to flood her eyes.

"You astonish me," he replied. "I had no idea that Mrs. Deering had made a mystery of her whereabouts. I knew, of course, that she always refused to go to Berwickbury, but I never dreamed—— Surely her mother has her address?"

"Yes, but she has also her instructions. She won't give it to me. Of course Hugh has never asked for it. Hugh is as—well, I can think of no other word than 'pig-headed'—as Janet herself. And yet he's killing himself for her."

"I never knew anything of the ground of their quarrel," said Stanton dispassionately. "Mrs. Deering is not the sort of woman to take the populace into her confidence. Of course you know that. I was amazed at her leaving Berwickbury. I shall never forget how shocked I was when I went over—let me see, it was shortly after Christmas, a year and a half ago—to consult with Deering on the hospital, and found their house boarded up and the 'to-let' sign on it."

Effie looked at him searchingly. There was something of the sternness of a young judge who has not learned to temper judgment with mercy on her delicate features. But gradually the austerity of her regard softened.

"It was a horrible time," she said, sinking back against the carved wood of her chair and sighing, as if she had slipped a burden from her shoulders with the movement. "Horrible! I've never understood it. I remember I came in one snowy afternoon, just a little before Christmas, and was talking with my father in his room, when Hugh came striding into the house and called to me to come downstairs. His voice was strange. I knew that something was the matter. I thought perhaps it was something out at the hos-

pital; it was the time that the electricians' strike was pending, you may remember. But when I went down to him, he was walking up and down the sitting room like one of the poor animals in a menagerie cage. His face was quite white. You know how ruddy and brown he was always."

She spoke with the loving woman's wistful dwelling upon some dear characteristic. Stanton, watching and listening, felt a renewal of the emotion with which she had first inspired him—tenderness, amusement, yearning, as if, in some mysterious way, a woman could be at once like a soft, shy, confiding little woodland animal, tamed to come to man, and like a protective Madonna in her altar niche. Why had he allowed ambition and the press of its activities to banish the sweetness and appeal of Effie Deering so long from his thoughts?

But she was going on with her story, and he realized that he had missed a sentence or two.

"So of course I went at once," she was saying, and Stanton interrupted her.

"Forgive me, Miss Effie, but I lost the thread there."

She looked up at him, a little astonished.

"I was saying that when Hugh told me he and Janet had had a dreadful quarrel and she was threatening to leave him, and that he wanted me to go and reason with her, of course I went at once."

"You didn't even pause to ask him who was at fault?"

"What difference did it make who was at fault? They loved each other."

"That, I dare say," said Stanton, "was the root of the whole trouble. Love finds it so much more difficult than indifference to forgive."

Effie gazed at him doubtfully.

"It's never seemed so to me," she answered. "Indifference—yes, I sup-

pose indifference doesn't care what one does. One can't wound it. It has no hurts to forgive. But real love—Oh, well, never mind. I want to tell you about this as well as I can, so you'll be willing to help me.

"I went to Janet. She was packing—furiously. She frightened me. You know how ill she had been—how dreadfully, dreadfully ill. Well, she looked to me as if she were about to have a dangerous relapse. Her eyes were burning, and her cheeks were hot, and her hands, when I took hold of them, parched mine. I asked her what she was doing, and she answered me like a person in a delirium. But she wouldn't tell me why she was going.

"Your brother knows why I'm going," she said. 'Hugh knows. It concerns only him and me. If he wishes to tell you, he will.'

"I reminded her that she had been sick, that she was easily unstrung, that perhaps she didn't see things quite as she might if she were fully recovered, and she laughed. It was a dreadful laugh!" Effie shivered, remembering.

"She said: 'Yes, I have been ill. I've gone down into deep waters for your brother and his child and my love and hope for them. Now I'm through with him and love. What was he doing while I suffered and dreamed and hoped? He's shown me what an unutterable fool and visionary I've been.'

"Well, she sounded mad to me, of course, quite mad; not in the least like our sane, level-headed, efficient Janet. But nothing I could say would influence her. Not even when I spoke of my father, though she cared very tenderly for him. Not even when I spoke of her own father, though she had always had some sort of a notion of expiation in regard to him. Perhaps you don't know about the Fowlers in Berwickshire?"

"Yes, I've heard of that old affair."

"But even that only made her laugh

again, one of those dreadful laughs. And she said: 'Well, I think the score is settled now. And the honors are with the Deerings.' But she wouldn't tell me what she meant. And she told me, by and by, to call a cab. And she refused to eat dinner. I called Hugh on the telephone to let him know that she was taking a train to New York, and that he must come himself and persuade her to stay. I told him that he must be to blame. But he— You don't know how obstinate Hugh can be!"

"Well," said Stanton, smiling and speaking lightly to ease the strain of the narrative, "he's put up one of my buildings. I've some slight notion of his capacity for obstinacy."

"Well, all that he would say was that he had taken the blame upon himself already, but that he declined to crawl and plead like an abject criminal, and that if she felt like making a ridiculous spectacle of herself and him over nothing or next to nothing, she would have to do it. I reminded him that she was still half sick, that she had had a dreadful shock which had shaken her nerves and a grief that had almost broken her heart. But while I was saying that, she came and caught the telephone from my hand and cried out:

"Don't dare to beg pity for me! Don't dare!"

"And then she spoke to him, bitterly, proudly, insultingly."

"You poor child!" said Stanton softly.

"It was rather a ghastly time," Effie admitted. "Well, her cab came and she went. She looked at me sweetly at the end, and she said: 'Effie, you're a tender little thing. Don't ever marry—you'd be too badly hurt.' And she kissed me with her poor, hot, dry lips. And I've never seen her since."

"Hugh kept the house open for two weeks, and then he stored the furniture and gave up the lease and came

home to live. He's been living at home ever since. Father didn't know at first. I kept it from him until after Christmas, though I think he suspected something wrong. Else why didn't Hugh and Janet come up on Christmas afternoon, as they had done the year before? And when, finally, he had to hear, he was dreadfully distressed. And then he had that second shock."

"You poor, poor child!" Stanton repeated.

"No, it isn't poor me," said Effie. "It's poor Hugh—it was poor, father. As long as father lived, Hugh didn't seem to me quite so pitiful. Father was proud of the business, you see, and somehow his pride and ambition, even though he had to lie there on the bed like a poor tree that has been felled, kept Hugh to the mark."

"The work on the State hospital was magnificent," the architect testified. "And I've heard only the best things of the Sands Point hotel and the library at New Dublin. I haven't heard much for the past few months. You see, I was in England and France early last winter, and when I came back, I had to make my headquarters in New York."

He tried to speak modestly, but there was a little note of exultation in the careful casualness of his voice.

"It's beautiful, your success." Effie called her mind from its intense journeyings upon other paths and looked at him with the light of honest congratulation in her eyes. "I couldn't help being glad and proud, even though I thought that——"

"Even though you thought what?"

She studied him gravely. A warm flush stained the pure pallor of her face, but her eyes held steady.

"Even though I thought—I almost thought—that you had had something to do with the estrangement between Hugh and Janet."

"May I ask how you ever came by

such a preposterous notion?" Stanton spoke with a touch of haughtiness.

"I had it—oh, just a suggestion—from Janet's cousin, Beatrice. Mrs. Creamer she was then. The Countess Something-or-other she is now."

"Countess Zerna. She married a Hungarian attached to the Austrian embassy." Stanton filled in the biographical data mechanically. "I think I must ask you to tell me in what way Mrs. Creamer connected me with the affairs of your brother and his wife."

"It wasn't anything definite, you see," pleaded Effie. "But—well, she reminded me, in such a way that I scarcely knew I was being reminded, that you admired Janet very much and——"

"I did. I do. I have the greatest admiration for her ability, the greatest respect for her character, and the most grateful affection to her for all that she has given me of stimulation and help. But——"

"I know! But Beatrice makes simple, honest things seem crooked and queer. I couldn't possibly tell you when or how she put the thought in my mind——"

Did she put it into your brother's also?"

"I don't think Hugh ever had any conversation with her after Janet went away. But she might have done it before. Not maliciously, you know. It wouldn't seem anything but amusing to her, a flirtation or a disloyalty——"

"That's quite true of the countess, but I wonder how a little innocent, Botticelli maiden like you learned it."

"I seem," said Effie, a trifle wearily, "to have learned a tremendous lot during the last year and a half—mostly things I didn't want to know."

"You shall forget them, every one of them!" Stanton spoke with enthusiastic determination. Then he went back. "But tell me more about our subtle friend and her innuendoes."

"There isn't much to tell. I don't know what she said, or when. I only know that there grew up in my mind the suspicion that perhaps, if Janet hadn't found you more in sympathy with her views than Hugh, she wouldn't have allowed the quarrel with him to become so fixed, so permanent. I can't tell you what she said—Beatrice, I mean—but she left me with the feeling she *had* said that, after all, we Deerings were poor, plain, crude people and that, after all, Janet wasn't and that you weren't, and that intellectually, as well as—er—socially, you and she had more in common than she and poor Hugh. Oh, I don't know what she said! I only remember how I felt after she had talked a little while.

"And then one morning I found in the mail a marked newspaper. It was a great, red-penciled circle. I can see yet how it looked. It was a Hartford paper. It said that you were moving your headquarters to New York in order to be in closer touch with Fowler Ashdown and the heads of the Ashdown Foundation Building Committee. It said that you had been chosen to design the model workmen's community which was going to be the first undertaking of the Ashdown Foundation. And there was a paper like it at Hugh's place. I saw his face when he opened it and read the paragraph. He was gray, and there were lines in his face like the lines in metal. You see, Fowler Ashdown is Janet's own cousin."

"Of course I see. And it *was* Mrs. Deering who gained me my chance with her cousin when he came into that huge fortune of his. I like to think," he added, blushing youthfully, "that there is some merit in my plans. But I don't deny for an instant that it was Mrs. Deering who brought me to her cousin's notice when he made up his mind to spend part of that unwieldy wealth of his in housing experimentation. It was she who first turned my



She moved from behind the screen and came upon her husband and her cousin on the other side of it.

thoughts toward that branch of architecture. I dare say it was she who first turned his toward that form of philanthropy—if it is to be called philanthropy. It was largely to look into the best experiments in the workingman's housing problem in England and France that I was abroad last November and December."

"Mr. Stanton, where is Janet? I want to go and see her," Effie cut in upon his recital.

He looked distressed.

"What am I to do?" he asked her. "You tell me that Janet doesn't want to see you, hasn't allowed you to know where she is. She is my kindest friend. Am I to ignore her wishes and send you to her?"

It was at that moment that Hodge, throwing open the door from the entrance hall, ushered in a new caller. The eyes of the two women met.

"Effie!" breathed the one, leaning for support against the door. And, "Janey, Janey!" cried the other.

In another minute they were alone. Almeric Stanton, blessing the chance that had saved him the necessity of a decision he did not wish to make, had disappeared through the other door.

CHAPTER XVII.

When a ne'er-do-well, rolling stone of an Ashdown, unheard-of for decades, saw fit to die in South Africa and to leave to his brother Daniel, or the heirs of his brother Daniel's body, a spectacular fortune, the legatee, Fowler Ashdown, Daniel's only son, had been sincerely annoyed. His life suited him perfectly; it was arranged, he had thought, against the possibility of change. He had ample means for everything that a gentleman could desire or need, and he had, in addition, plenty to spend upon his scientific hobby. And here came this dead uncle, whose name was the most nebulous memory of his youth, to upset his entire scheme of existence. For the South African fortune was vast, requiring no mere simple man of business to manage it, but whole boards of them. And not even his passion for the results of exploration could deceive him into thinking that such a sum as his new income could be properly devoted to the spread of knowledge in regard to the flora and fauna of outlandish countries. No, he would have to take a vacation from his beloved pursuits and laboriously study plans for the righteous spending of his new millions.

He was forty-five and rather cut and dried. He had been forty-five and rather cut and dried for at least a quarter of a century, and matchmaking parents and marriageable girls had long since ceased to cherish matrimonial hopes of him. But of course they all felt that the new inheritance changed their duty in the matter. It would be a sin, nothing less, not to provide him with a competent spending

partner for all that money! And so Fowler Ashdown, for two decades happily free from feminine pursuit, had become again the quarry of all the loveliest, liveliest, most determined young women in society—and of some out of it.

It was Janet Deering who came to his rescue. He had not known that she was in New York when one day she appeared in the office of the curator of the Museum of Natural History, where he was enjoying a few minutes of peace examining a collection one of his latest expeditions had brought in from the interior of South America. It was then March, and he had been the unhappy heir of all South Africa—as it seemed to him—for four or five months.

"I called up your house, Cousin Fowler," she told him, as he tactfully managed to repress his first exclamation to the effect that she looked frightfully ill, "and they told me you were here. So I followed you. I wanted to catch you while the mood was upon me."

Mechanically Ashdown replied that he was always glad to see her, and the man with whom he was in consultation melted away, leaving the cousins alone.

"You don't look—er—quite the thing, Janet," he could not forbear remarking. "Have you been overdoing? Or haven't you fully recovered from your sickness of last fall?"

"Oh, I'm all right," she answered brusquely.

"By the way, what was the reason for such mad haste in getting that money back to me?" he asked her. "It was an investment with which I was perfectly satisfied. And, as you may have seen by the papers," he added grimly, "I'm not in any pressing need of money these days. I meant to write you about it, but I've been much occupied."

"What money?" Janet asked vaguely. Then she remembered. "Oh, the fifty

thousand dollars! I—I didn't know. It has been returned?"

"It was returned before the first of the year. Some time during the Christmas holidays. There was a courteous note accompanying the check, signed by your husband's secretary for him, if I remember aright—a routine communication. I acknowledged it in the same fashion, but I've been meaning to write and ask you if you were quite sure you—the concern—didn't need it any longer?"

"The work has all gone on so successfully," she replied, with a little gleam of pride in her tired, haunted eyes, "that it's quite easy for the concern to get what advances it needs from the banks. But I didn't know they had returned the money to you. I—I haven't been living in Berwickbury since a little before Christmas."

"Why, Janet! Why, my dear girl!" He was sincerely concerned.

"My marriage wasn't much of a success," she said briefly. "I don't want to go into it, if you don't mind. Hugh found me pretty trying, I suppose. I dare say most men don't really want partners and comrades in their homes—they'd rather have sirens. I'm not built to be an enslaver of hearts, Cousin Fowler. And I dare say I wasn't very successful as a partner. So—we called it off. Don't look as if you were sorry for me," she broke off half angrily.

"It's Deering I'm sorry for," he answered.

"I came to see you," she resumed, in her nervous imitation of a hard, matter-of-fact tone, "because I want to interest you in a certain plan——"

"You're the seven-hundred-and-thirty-fifth, to date."

She laughed, and something of the tension seemed to leave her face.

"Poor Fowler!" she commiserated him.

He looked at his watch.

"Come," he said. "It's luncheon

time. Let's go down to Sherry's and eat. You can tell me all about your marvelous plan for increasing my millions. The other seven hundred and thirty-four were all guaranteed to return me from twelve to a thousand per cent on the investment——"

"Mine will be an experiment. You may lose. But you can certainly afford to!"

"I certainly can!" he agreed lugubriously. "Well, come and tell me about it, anyway. And your presence will protect me against all the lovely girls and astute mothers who may also happen to be lunching there."

"Protector of the rich—that shall be my new title," she said, smiling. But he noticed that the smile was altogether on her lips and not at all in her eyes.

She talked, during the luncheon, with much greater volubility than he remembered as characteristic of her. Each word seemed to use up volumes of nervous force. There was no question about it—she had suffered, she was suffering. She was thinner than she had been; that was not altogether to be deplored, Ashdown decided. Perhaps the hollowing beneath her eyes and in her cheeks had gone a shade too far; but she was more interesting, more beautiful, than she had seemed to him in the days of what he mentally called her bovine period. Her nerves, her heart, were not so securely padded against the onslaught of emotion by sanity, by calm, by a preconceived philosophy of life. Something—sorrow apparently, suffering assuredly—had tuned the fine instrument of her nature; it was, he felt sure, capable of far more beautiful, more poignant melodies than it had ever been before. Thus he read her, while she talked and talked.

Suddenly he gave his attention to her words.

"Don't you see," she was saying in her nervous, forceful way, "the whole problem is a housing one—the modern

woman's and the modern workingman's? Never mind the women like me now—the professional class; we can manage somehow to take care of our own problems. But the working woman's—can't you see how interesting it would be? A whole community whose housing was designed, not on the theory that in every home there is a woman with time and training to fit her to do its work, but on the fact—the fact, Cousin Fowler!—that in almost every workingman's home there is no one but the children under school age for ten hours a day! Meet that situation without sacrificing the home, meet that fact—it is a fact, Fowler!—without absolutely destroying the charm and sacredness of privacy—do that, and you will have been the realest benefactor of the times. You can afford to try it out in a limited way, can't you?"

"Yes, I can afford it," he replied. He was looking at her intently. "What turned your thoughts in this direction?" he asked her abruptly.

She colored faintly.

"Oh, difficulties of my own—little difficulties! And the much greater ones of some of my working friends."

"Janet," he told her, with unexpected fervor, "if you've been able to get outside your personal difficulties, to define them in terms of other women's lives and to try to meet them as other women's—not merely as your own—you're going to be a big woman, some day!"

The faint color deepened in her cheeks. She stared at her cousin with a slight surprise.

"Oh, there's nothing very big about it," she answered. "One must do something. But—are you interested?"

"I'm interested," he replied briefly. "We'll get busy on this—its possibilities, its feasibility, I mean—to-morrow. Let's see—we'll want the heads of some big industrial plant and some housing experts——"

"And domestic-science teachers and playground experts," she struck in.

He took a notebook from his pocket and jotted down suggestions for fifteen minutes. When he had put it up again, he said:

"Have you left your husband for good, Janet? What steps are you taking toward a divorce?"

"None. I believe he can get one in our—in his—State, for desertion."

"He would probably not wish to be the aggressor in such a case, Janet. He struck me as a very chivalrous sort of fellow——"

"Please, Cousin Fowler!"

"Well, I don't want to be offensive to you. But a gentleman doesn't care to institute proceedings against his wife."

"Oh, the matter will adjust itself," she said wearily. "Let's not talk about it."

"But you're both young. It's useless to blink facts. It's a situation unfair to you both."

"I've told you that he can end it whenever he wishes—make our separation final and legal and all that. Please let's not talk about it. Let's"—she smiled—"talk only about the Ashdown Foundation for Model Industrial Home Communities."

"I'm not at all sure," Fowler Ashdown replied, "that I shall wish to confine my talks with you to that topic."

But as he spoke with the same air of pedantic precision he would have used in classifying a beetle, Janet did not blush again.

CHAPTER XVIII.

On that June afternoon when Effie and Janet were looking, with love and longing and a tumultuous storm of recollection, into each other's eyes across Stanton's decorative reception room, Beatrice Zerna—as she had been for nearly a year now—sat in her own

sitting room on the second floor of a Washington house that faced the White House across the leafy barricade of Lafayette Square. She was subtly changed from the excitement seeker of her earlier days. The color was painted now upon a face whiter than hers had been; her eyes, for all their habitual tricks of provocation and languor, sometimes sprang wide open and showed fear in their greenish depths.

She was sumptuously attired, though her robe was a lounging one. It was silk, iridescently blue and green, and it was girdled with rough, barbaric chunks of turquoise set in dull, carved, flexible silver links. There were turquoises banding the low, square-cut neck, and there were buckles of turquoise on her shimmering green silk slippers. Her little figure, her magnificent dress, were repeated a hundred times in the gold-leaf-framed mirrors that paneled the walls alternately with oblongs of pale yellow brocade.

She had given the pleasing reflection the tribute of a momentary smile of pleasure, but it had soon faded and the curious expression, half ennui, half apprehension, so new to her face, reasserted itself as she walked toward the window and looked into the greenery of the square park.

"I'm horribly bored!" she told herself. "Horribly! I think I shall go in for flying—that must give one a thrill! I don't suppose Stephen would let me, though."

The form in which she had cast her thought arrested her own attention for a moment. She grew a little paler beneath the rouge. To think that, in less than a year, she had been reduced to this—to debating what a man, any man on earth, would "let" her do! She drew her small form more erect. Her eyes flashed. It was utterly absurd, this feeling that had been growing upon her ever since she had achieved the most brilliant, the most dashing, dé-

nouement of her career, and, with her share of the Creamer millions and her *diablerie* and charm, had won for her husband a member of one of the oldest nobilities of Europe. Really, she had thought, a year ago, when that desirable result had been about to be achieved, that she would never have another moment of listless, undefined desire in the world.

Count Zerna was young, scarcely six years older than herself. He was extremely good looking. He made love with a perfection bespeaking long practice in the gentle art. Some women would have hated that, but Beatrice had always liked finish and style in everything. It had not hurt her in the least to realize her husband's training, or even to foresee that in the future it would be used upon many others than herself. She had always had a taste for the great world, its vices as well as its graces, and she did not shrink from accepting it upon its own terms. But now—

"Ah, is that you, Stephen?" She whirled abruptly from the window at the sound of the light rap upon her door, so swiftly followed by its opening and by her husband's appearance, smiling, in the aperture. "I didn't expect you back so soon."

"The conference ended earlier than I had hoped," he told her, advancing and kissing her hand with graceful ceremony. "I've good news for you. Your period of broiling is almost over. You won't have to stay in this delightful oven of a Washington any longer."

"That's good news," answered Beatrice, "although I can't really say I've begun to suffer yet. When do we go to Manchester?"

"You may send the servants to-morrow, those whom you are taking. And I think that you and I will be able to join them either the day after or on Friday. Thursday, I hope. I'm yearning for a swim in the sea."

"There's still something that will detain you here for a day or two?"

"No. Not here."

He paused and looked at her with steady, appraising eyes—very handsome eyes, hard and blue as lapis lazuli. His mouth, well-cut, although the lips beneath the close-clipped dark mustache were a trifle thin, never ceased to smile as he regarded her. The luster of his eyes, the whiteness of his teeth, the ruddy color that painted his olive cheeks, the black of his hair, his eyebrows, and mustache, all seemed to her unreal and implacable as she looked at them; he was like a painted statue. And the smile, the long, slow look, affected her with that curious sense of fear she had never felt until she had met him, had married him. Well, at any rate, it was a new sensation, and sensations could not be frequent, new, or violent enough for her. Her quarrel with life had always been that it held too few; why should she shrink away from this one with which her husband inspired her?

"Not here? Where, then?"

Her voice was light. But he did not reply directly.

"*Chérie*, why do you suppose that you, out of a whole worldful of beautiful women, completely won me?" His eyes still held hers, as the snake's the bird's.

"I dare say," she replied smiling, "that my inheritance from my former husband had something to do with it."

"Spoken like an American, countess!" Without a change of voice, without a change of smile, he managed to overwhelm her with a sneer. "I won't trouble to deny your slander against yourself. No, it was not your money—though I do not indulge myself in the foolish affectation of despising money. It was your wisdom and your daring. It was your eagerness for excitement, and your cool cleverness in never allowing yourself to be carried

away by excitement. You have a remarkable combination of qualities, my beloved wife."

Beatrice swept him a mocking curtsy.

"A thousand thanks," she said, "although I think the compliment, if analyzed, might prove something of a criticism. But what has this to do with our going to Manchester to-morrow?"

Still he stared; still he smiled.

"Are you a patriot, countess?" The question cut the flower-scented air of the pretty little room like a shot.

"An American patriot, or a Hungarian one?" asked Beatrice, still smiling.

Her pulses were beginning to hammer in her wrists. There was something really exciting in which she could have a hand, then! Her husband arose and bowed to her with exaggerated deference.

"That is most sweet of you, my dear—to remember that you are now a Hungarian! But fortunately there need be no division of allegiances at present. Every true American patriot must desire to see his country stand outside this frightful carnage——"

"You aren't addressing a public assembly, Stephen. You're only talking to me," she reminded him.

"Ah, you mock at my sonorous periods! But I'm speaking sincerely. Every patriotic American must desire to see his country kept out of this war, and I assure you"—he laughed—"that all patriotic Austrians—which, for the moment, includes the Hungarians also—desire the same thing—to see America stand outside the war! May I count upon your good offices?"

"You have, of course, the right to command them," she told him lazily. "But it's only fair to let you know that neither I nor any one I know has the slightest influence with our dear government or our dear American people."

His face changed. For a second he

ceased to look at her and looked at some vision in his mind which distorted his handsome features with a look of rage. But it was gone almost before her eyes had taken it in.

"Fear will have influence," he told her abruptly, almost harshly, "fear of their lives, fear of their sacrosanct property. Beatrice, will you help me? I command nothing—it is always yours to command and mine to obey—but I beg you to act with me—for your country and for mine!"

"It sounds like very good fun," she replied. "Of course you don't want me to do anything criminal?"

He laughed at the idea.

"I have no taste for the interior of one of your Federal prisons," he told her, "nor for disgrace at home. Criminal? Hardly! But—you have property in that Berwickbury of which you have told me?"

"Not a stick, not a stone, not a blade of grass!"

He drew back and looked at her, dark with sudden anger.

"But I thought that you came from there—your family. I thought that for many generations——"

"We did come from there, the Fowlers, my mother's people, and the Hineses, too. But my father and mother lost almost everything they had in a bank failure there when I was a little girl. They were obliged to sell out all their holdings. I have property in other places, if that would be of any use to you."

"No, no, it must be Berwickbury."

He spoke impatiently. He paced the room for a moment and finally came to

a pause at the window looking across toward the White House.

"I suppose I could have a gush of family feeling," suggested Beatrice, "and buy up the old Hines place."

He whirled about and faced her brilliantly.

"Wonderful! Wonderful! Ah, I knew I could always count upon your resourcefulness." He bent over her and kissed her passionately. "That will be it! You will buy your old homestead—you will remodel it. It shall be our headquarters in the United States. Every year, after this war is over and we are living again at home, we will cross to this side of the ocean on a pious pilgrimage and will light filial fires upon your ancestors' hearths. Splendid! Will you go to-morrow and begin your negotiations?"

"I'll do anything you say, but I'm horribly in the dark about it all so far."

He did not heed her remark; he was looking at a list of names in a notebook.

"I will tell you," he said, and his manner had changed to that of an officer giving instructions, "what men to choose to act as your agents. You will not wish, of course, to bother with tiresome details yourself."

He drew a chair close to the chaise longue on which she reclined; he went swiftly and softly to the door—he had the soft, stealthy grace of a cat or a tiger—and pulled it abruptly open. But the hall beyond was empty, and when he opened the door into his own dressing room, it was equally bare of eavesdroppers. And finally he sat down beside his wife and began to talk to her in quick, low tones.

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A Woman of Means

By Virginia Middleton

Author of "Mrs. Estabrook's Emeralds," "The Friendly Dog," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERT A. GRAEF

Are heredity and environment as all-important as they are said to be? Read the peculiar case of the Dawson twins, told here by a woman of experience and understanding.

YOU needn't talk to me about heredity and environment and all that kind of thing as enough of an explanation of human beings. You've got to add something to them—the mood that God was in when He made 'em is what I should call it. But I'm old-fashioned. The way my sons and daughters, and especially my grandsons and granddaughters, talk, you'd think that it was about as benighted to believe in God as to believe literally in Jonah and the whale. They're great—especially the youngsters—on heredity and environment. You'd think those were more than words.

But there was the case of Lavinia and Peggy Dawson. They were twins, and if I had belonged to the same family, I should have come near to making them triplets, for I was only three days younger. And I was born next door, just across two stretches of rough lawn with a scraggy lilac hedge between. So I can say without boasting that I came pretty near to knowing Lavinia and Peggy. And they were twins, born not five minutes apart, one gusty March morning—the same wind was blowing when I came following along on Crabtree Lane. They had exactly the same kind of upbringing—the Dawsons weren't the kind of people to give one child chances that they didn't give another. So there you are, with heredity and environment identical. And I

should like to see a pair more unlike than those two girls!

They always wore the same kind of dresses—that was part of Mother Dawson's system. But Lavinia's always lasted twice as long. She used to take good care of her clothes even when she was a little mite. When she grew older—about nine or ten—she used sometimes to save her own things by sneaking Peggy's out of her closet and her little bureau and wearing them instead. Peggy wouldn't know the difference until she found them all shabby. It was a thrifty way, wasn't it?

It was the same with her dolls and toys. No sooner had old Santa dropped down all the wide-mouthed chimneys on our little Crabtree Lane, than Lavinia Dawson would carefully compare what he had left for her with what he had left for Peggy. There never was an iota's difference; at any rate, there never was until the girls were old enough to receive their gifts from relatives and friends, instead of from the Christmas saints. Then, I will say, Peggy used to get more presents and ones a shade the better. For all the relatives and friends liked Peggy and felt only lukewarm about Lavinia. But while the girls were little enough to believe in Santa Claus, and received exactly the same things, it was Lavinia's habit to wrap hers up carefully, lock them away in her little hair-covered trunk, and then say to Peggy:

"We'll play with your things first."

Peggy never objected. Possessions never seemed very important to her. And by and by, when all her dolls had lost their sawdust and their features, and when her Noah's Ark animals were missing or cripples, and her doll piano wouldn't give out even one cracked note—along about March, say—then, if you please, Lavinia would emerge with a perfectly fresh set of playthings and would be the great power in the Lane. We all liked Peggy better, we children, but we did toady abominably to the possessions of Lavinia. And Lavinia used to pay us up for liking Peggy better by excluding Peggy as much as possible from the festivities surrounding the fresh toys.

Well, they grew up by and by. They grew to be fifteen, sixteen, seventeen—quite young ladies according to the old-fashioned notion in Camden. People believed in marrying young in those days, and getting their families raised early, so as to have some one to help them with the work, I suppose. And Peggy and Lavinia began to have beaux when they were fifteen or so. Lavinia had grown to be quite a handsome girl, with big, prominent brown eyes and hair as black as a coal and a wonderful complexion like the fashion pictures in *Godey's*. She was tall and straight, too, and wore her summer lawns and gingham with quite an air.

Peggy wasn't so pretty. She was little and nondescript in her figure, and she used to put on her clothes "any which way," as we called it. She had a little sprinkling of freckles across her nose and the upper part of her cheeks, and she had laughing hazel eyes and curly light-brown hair. Everybody liked her, but there was no denying that, of the twins, it was Lavinia who carried off the palm for looks.

Well, one day, when we were all seventeen, Lou Pettingill came back. Lou's people had been Laners, but they had

moved out West when we three girls hadn't been more than seven or eight years old. Even if Lou had lived in the Lane, we probably shouldn't have seen much of him, for he was a good deal our senior. He would have seemed a big fellow to us during all those early years. But when he came back, just twenty-five to our seventeen, we had learned the way to make young men look up to us, instead of our looking up to them. We were as old as he, or older, in natural guile.

He hadn't come back to stay, but just on a long visit to his mother's folks. We gathered that the West was a much better place for a young man than Camden. He managed to make it look to us about the same way, I suppose, as a steamship agent makes America look to a village full of Polish peasants. All the boys that lived in the Lane were very much excited about the possibilities of Wyoming; and lots of the girls looked as if they wouldn't mind a mite going back with Lou. He was a good-looking fellow, full of fun. You couldn't help feeling good-natured where he was.

Well, after he met the Dawson girls, there wasn't much show for any of the rest of us. At first, you couldn't tell which one it was he was after. He was always dropping around to the house, swapping stories on the front porch with Pa Dawson, or reminding Ma Dawson of pranks he had played when he was a little fellow and lived in the Lane. But his eyes were generally following the girls around. He beamed them pretty equally for a few weeks. If he took Lavinia to the Sunday-school picnic out at Wilmot's Grove, he took Peggy rowing down the river in the moonlight. If he paid a lot of attention to Peggy at the quilting circle, he was apt to make it up to Lavinia by walking home with her the next Friday from prayer meeting. That was for a few weeks.



It was natural that Peggy should call me over to tell me, with many blushes and a shine in her hazel eyes, that Lou had popped the question the night before.

Then, one day, Peggy called me in through the break in the lilac hedge that had been made when we were little things. I was more of a friend to her than Lavinia was. I don't think she often told Lavinia anything, and I am sure that Lavinia never told her anything that could be kept secret. So it was natural that Peggy should call me over to tell me, with many blushes and a shine in her hazel eyes, that Lou had popped the question the night before.

The first thing I thought of was how

lonely I should be when Peggy went off to Wyoming. Strange how selfish we all are! And Abner was courting me even then. She asked me not to say anything yet about her and Lou; we were all plain people that lived in Crabtree Lane, plain American people, and there was no asking father's permission to pay addresses, and there was no announcing the engagement, the way those things are done now. If you were going to get married, you didn't admit it in general until it was time to engage.

the parson and the bell ringers. You finally stopped denying it when your linen chest and your sets were all complete. So, of course, I knew how Peggy felt.

She explained that, of course, they would be married pretty soon, for Lou was only going to be East four months. They'd be married on the day before he started back; and would I help her get her things ready? She'd have an awful lot of sewing to do in those two months! And I said that of course I would help her and that of course Lavinia would help her, and we'd get a lot done in a hurry.

Peggy sort of pursed her lips and looked doubtful about the help that Lavinia was going to give to her. She seemed to dread breaking the news to her sister. I—I was always practical—pointed out to her that Lavinia would have to know if we were to get any sewing out of her, and it certainly was necessary to get the sewing. And Peggy sighed and looked wistful, and the blushes faded and she said, yes, she supposed so.

I don't know how Lavinia acted when she heard the news. Peggy had a good deal of loyalty and, close as she and I were to each other, she never said anything against her sister. However, I could see for myself how she—Lavinia, I mean—acted. Never a needle did she stick into an inch of long cloth. Peggy brought her sewing over to our house to do, partly because we could keep the neighborhood from guessing the news longer that way, and partly because Lavinia made it so unpleasant at home, I am sure.

But however unpleasant she made it for Peggy, she didn't make it unpleasant for Lou. When he came to see Peggy, she was always right there—big brown eyes, bold and flashing, sleek black hair simply glistening from brushing and from contrast to a red rose behind her ear, full lips very red,

smooth cheeks very pink, lawn dresses very crisp and frilly. I told Peggy I wouldn't put up with the way she sat around, seeing that she knew perfectly well how things stood. But Peggy tossed her head—she was a spunky little thing.

"Thank the Lord, I ain't so badly in need of a beau," she said, "that I'm going to fight my own sister to keep him to myself!"

Well, as things turned out, she would have done better to have listened to me. One afternoon—it was in October and everything was very sparkling and winy up in our country—Lou came around with a spanking team from Sterrett's livery stable to take Peggy for a ride. They had arranged about it the night before. Well, if you please, Lavinia had been looking peaked all day and complaining of a headache and when she saw the team, she sighed:

"Oh, if I could only take a little mite of a drive, I think it would cure my head!"

And Peggy—it was just like her—said: "Well, why don't you do it? I'd like to finish this ruffle, anyway, before I set out. Lou said he wouldn't be here till three o'clock and it's only two. You get him to take you first, and come back for me."

And Lavinia looked at her and sighed and said, in a spindling kind of voice:

"Oh, could I, really?"

And so that was the way it was arranged.

Now, the only two people that ever knew the truth about what happened on that drive were Lou Pettingill and Lavinia Dawson. Neither of them ever told. They came back not at three o'clock for Lavinia to give the place in the buggy to Peggy, and not at four, when Peggy was staring out the window for them, her ruffles and her seams forgotten, and not at five when she and her mother were worried to death for

fear there had been an accident, a runaway or something. They never came back at all until eleven o'clock that night. There weren't any telephones in those days, you remember, and you couldn't call up every house along the Alexandria Turnpike to find out if there had been an upset anywhere along it. You had to wait for your bad news the same as you had to wait for your good.

Well, they turned up, as I say, at eleven o'clock, Lou looking sort of gray and stony and Lavinia holding her head as high as ever, with bright red spots in her cheeks. Everybody crowded to the door to ask them what had detained them. They had left the team down at Sterrett's livery on Warburton Avenue and had come walking up the Lane. I was over there with Peggy, trying to persuade her that nothing really serious had happened—just a wheel off the buggy or something like that that made it hard to come home, but hadn't hurt any one.

They marched into the big hall that ran through the house.

"Will you tell them, Lou, or shall I?" asked Lavinia in a voice as hard and bright and clear as ice.

Lou never even looked at Peggy. He didn't look at any one. He looked down at the hat he held in his hand, and at first he sort of mumbled: "You tell them," and then, as soon as the words were out of his mouth, he lifted up his head and cried: "No, by God, I'll tell them myself!"

"Well, be quick about it, whichever one of you is going to speak," said Pa Dawson, short and nervous, sensing that something dreadful was coming.

"Peggy," said Lou Pettingill, "your sister Lavinia and I—your sister Lavinia and I were married at Alexandria in the Methodist parsonage there, at eight o'clock this evening."

Then he stood looking at her, and

if ever I saw love and despair on a human face, I saw them on his.

I had my arm around Peggy, and I thought maybe she was going to faint. A quiver ran all through her, like the quiver in a piano string when you strike the note. But she didn't faint. She had been real pale, but now color began to come up into her face. She stiffened—I could feel it. And then she got away from my arm and, holding herself quite steady, she said:

"Well, Lavinia, if you wanted a husband as bad as all that, I can't grudge him to you—especially the kind you got."

And with that she turned and started to walk up the stairs, with Lou calling after her, "Peggy, Peggy!" as if any amount of calling would do any good then! Like a man, wasn't it?

Well, that was the way Lavinia Dawson got her first husband, and that was the way Peggy lost her first beau. You might almost have said her last beau, too, for she didn't have much to do with the boys after that. You can scarcely blame her. She turned her trousseau over to Lavinia, not sweetly and meekly and generously, as it sounds, but with a kind of pride and contempt. But Lavinia was never one to mind the spirit in which anything was given, as long as she got the thing! She took Peggy's outfit, if you please, and packed it, and went off with Lou Pettingill to his Wyoming ranch. I hope he had the kind of time he deserved to have with her. I always suspected that he did. He died about four years later, leaving her quite a well-off widow and still a real young woman. You'd call her a chit of a girl in these days, seeing that she was only twenty-one. But we didn't call it that in my time. I was married and had two children, myself, at twenty-one, and sometimes felt a real old woman.

You might have thought an experience like that would have made Peggy



"Will you tell them, Lou, or shall I?" asked Lavinia in a voice as hard and bright and clear as ice.

permanently sour, but it didn't. It gave her, as I have said, a sort of distaste for young men for a while, and by the time she had gotten over that distaste she was regarded as an old maid—all of twenty-four or five she must have been. She regarded herself as an old maid, too, which is probably a greater handicap to matrimony than having other people regard you as one. She took it for granted she was all done with beaux and the like, and she was just "Aunt' Peggy" to my half dozen, and to all the children along the Lane. Her own father and mother were dead,

and they had left the place altogether to her. If you'll believe me, Lavinia Pettingill, out in Wyoming, with all her miles of pasture and all her herds of cattle, allowed she was going to go to law about it! But she didn't have to. Peggy bought her out. Peggy had had a little ready money left her by an aunt, and Lavinia consented to be bought off.

"Thank the Lord," said Peggy, "I'm not so poor I'm obliged to cheat the Widow Pettingill out of what she thinks is hers!"

I don't know as I ever told you how,

Crabtree Lane ran off of Warburton Avenue? Warburton was quite a grand thoroughfare for Camden, and the house at the corner where Crabtree Lane started was three stories, brick and brownstone, and it had its own stable in the back, and two or three acres of orchard and lawn and garden. It used to be vacant years at a time, except for a caretaker or a lawyer going into it and keeping the rats from running away with it. It belonged to the De Witts and we used to think the De Witts very rich people indeed, we Crabtree Lane folk. Didn't they have their own greenhouse and their own gardens, and wasn't there a sort of round tower above their roof, from which you could look out to the river and the bay? All that meant a great deal of wealth to our minds. To be sure, we used sometimes to hear that they lived in Europe because it was cheaper, but that rumor of their poverty never outweighed the tangible evidence of their riches in the shape of their fine house.

Well, Peggy and I had grown to be women of forty, and I was beginning to spoil my first grandchild, when, one day, astonishing news came to us in the Lane. Some property of the De Witts—a mine out West, it was—had suddenly been found profitable to work and their interest had been sold for quite a lot of money. And the De Witts were coming home and were going to open the Warburton Avenue house.

None of us knew exactly who the De Witts were, it had been so long since any of them had come home; but by questioning the oldest inhabitant of the Lane, we learned that there was nobody left but a father and son. And sure enough, home they came, a little nervous, rusty, gray old man and a tall, thin, good-looking boy, twenty or twenty-one. They came with the loads of furniture they had gotten abroad, and trunks and trunks of things. And we were all much excited.

But no sooner were they settled than the old gentleman went out West to see something about his mine, and the young one proceeded to scandalize our respectable town by getting drunk. We didn't expect drunkenness of our first families in Camden in those days; or, if we did expect it—if we had any reason to expect it—we knew that it would be conducted secretly. But this young fellow practiced no concealment. We were all much put about by it and talked a good deal about neighborhood disgrace.

Peggy was the only one in the Lane who could see any good in the boy, and who made any effort to help him. She had him there as often as he would come; and when I told her that, then, my Margaret couldn't go there so much, she only said that Margaret had a good home, and she guessed that Ledlie de Witt needed her most! Just like Peggy!

Well, one morning she came running over to say she'd had a letter from Lavinia—something that hadn't happened since the Widow Pettingill had set up a claim to a share in her father's house. And her letter said, if you please, that she was married again and was coming back to Camden to live. She had married old Mr. de Witt, no one else, and was coming back to the big house at the corner of Crabtree Lane! She said in her letter that she was willing to let bygones be bygones—*she was!*—and to live on neighborly terms with her sister. Somehow I fancied that, however much land and however many cattle Lavinia had out West, she still retained the feeling that all of us Crabtree Lane children had about the De Witt house; to live in that was greater and richer and more splendid than anything else that could happen.

So Lavinia came back to her old home. She was a handsome woman, as she had been a handsome girl. She had grown quite stout, but all her flesh

was firm and healthy looking, and she kept her clear, bright, prominent eyes and her red lips and red cheeks and her black, black hair. She had a look that I think people of to-day would call a look of efficiency. We called it "hard as nails" in those days.

But it was queer, with all her good looks and all that fine preservation of hers, she didn't really look as young as Peggy, whose hair was thickly streaked with gray and who had put on caps. Peggy still had her funny little freckles, and if there were lots of crow's-feet around her eyes, they had been made by laughing with all the children in the Lane; and if there were deep-dented lines about her mouth, it was laughing with the children that had made them. And if there were funny lines across her forehead, I think they all came from lifting her eyebrows when she questioned people as to what she could do for them, or asked them to come over to her house for supper, or if they wouldn't send the children over for her to take care of while they went downtown shopping. Peggy's face was sort of shabby and worn, I know, but it was shabby and worn the way the old carpets in her house were shabby and worn and the way her old piano was worn—all from lots of use, lots of loving use. And somehow I think that keeps a face looking younger than all the fine color and all the smoothness in the world.

The new Mrs. de Witt's first act, after she had settled herself, was to decree that young Ledlie de Witt should not stay in the house if he ever came home again drunk. She allowed that it was treating her with disrespect. It didn't seem to worry her so much that it was treating himself with worse than disrespect. And the old man acquiesced in her decision. He was completely under her thumb.

Well, Ledlie had been trying to keep straight—that was Peggy's work. He

called her "Aunt Peggy," just as my young ones and all the other young ones in the Lane did. She had scolded him and made him drink black coffee and beef tea and had kept him in her house, where he'd have company and not be driven by sheer lonesomeness into harm. But, of course, now that his father was at home, and his new mother, it was appropriate that he should live there as long as he could fulfill the condition. But living there was the sort of thing to make him just naturally kick over the traces and smash the condition into smithereens. I'm a professing Christian woman myself, and have been a White Ribboner longer than I can remember, but I declare to goodness I think living with Lavinia de Witt in that old mausoleum of a house would have driven me to drink myself.

There was a dreadful time when he was regularly turned out. Peggy took the boy in and took care of him, and tried to intercede for him with his father and his stepmother. But neither of them would see the situation from Peggy's point of view. They said he was an ingrate and a ne'er-do-well, and I don't know what all besides; and they were people of their word; they didn't speak lightly and what they said they meant. And they would tell Miss Dawson—this was Old Man De Witt's speech, of course—that they thought she had very little to do to offer an asylum to a boy turned out of his own home for such excellent reason. It was the kind of thing that no woman—no single woman, Lavinia said, accenting the singleness—could afford to do, both on account of her means and of her reputation. Peggy should beware.

When Peggy told me about it, I couldn't help remembering her the way she had looked on the night when Lavinia had stolen her husband from her. And what Peggy repeated to me of what she said reminded me still more vividly of that night.

"I told Lavinia," she said, relating the story, "that I thanked my fate I wasn't too poor to take in a neighbor; and that I hadn't come to my time of life so poor in reputation that I could possibly injure it by being good to a homeless boy. And with that"—Peggy looked quite regal as she spoke—"I turned on my heel and left their house. I do not think, Abby, that Sister Lavinia and I are likely to be any closer friends now that she is a neighbor than we were when she lived in Wyoming."

And they weren't.

The young De Witt boy disappeared from Camden and from our neighborhood and from our lives, after this rumpus. He went back to Europe, and every now and then Peggy would have a letter from him. He never said anything much about himself in those letters, but only about his gratitude to her. He never told us—I say "us," for Peggy used to bring them over to me whenever they came—how or where he was living, and whether or not he had reformed, or anything. They never even gave an address to which Peggy might write.

In the stone-and-brick house at the corner, existence went on very grimly, I imagine. It seemed a sin to see that big house with only those two people in it, but they never entertained. When the Ladies' Auxiliary tried to get Lavinia to lend her house for a Christmas sale, she replied:

"I'm not a rich enough woman to do anything of the sort. I should have to heat and light the rooms and decorate them. The little that Mr. de Witt and I have we must save for our old age."

So the bazaar was held, as usual, down in Peggy's ramshackle old place.

"Thank the Lord," said Peggy piously, "I'm not too poor to give a little light and heat to the church, if they are any help to it."

That was always the way with Peggy from the time she was a little girl, you

see. She was always thanking the Lord for not being too poor for this or that little indulgence in benevolence. She had a run-down old orchard that made up for bearing stunted apples in the fall by being the loveliest sea of pink and white in the spring any one ever saw, and she was always willing to let people pick those blossoms to decorate the church, or to adorn a wedding, or to take to a hospital, or to pack a box for some neighborhood in the city where an apple blossom never blew except in a box. Lavinia, of course, with a whole acre of well-kept apple trees lying back of her stables and her greenhouses, never spared a blossom. And when the fall came, all the little rascals of the neighborhood knew that they were safe in invading Peggy's premises and stealing her fruit, while Lavinia's high brick wall with broken glass on the top was a very effectual warning to them of what would happen if they attempted any such thing with her.

"Thank the Lord," said Peggy, "I'm not too poor to let the children have a little fruit."

She had some grapevines growing over a trellis that led from the kitchen of the old Dawson place out to the woodshed, and I give you my word that more bunches of grapes went out to sick folks from that old trellis—she never could afford to have a carpenter come and fix it up and was always mending it herself with little pieces of rotten wood and string—than ever left Lavinia's. And Lavinia, if you please, had not only a wonderful little terrace of grapes growing at one end of her garden, but had in the hothouses those big black things that look almost as substantial as porterhouse steak and cost a sight more—"hothouse Hamburgs," I think they call them.

Well, that was the way it was with everything. Peggy was never too poor to be gay, to be kind, to be happy; and Lavinia never grew rich enough to be

any of those things. Even when her second husband died and left her everything, entirely cutting out his boy in Europe, she didn't feel herself well-to-do enough to do a cent's worth for other people, or even to have a good time herself. I took a great liberty that year. I went to her, in her fine, stiff house, and I said that I thought she ought to do something for Peggy. I pointed out to her that Peggy had nothing but the old Dawson place and some little shred of an income—it wasn't more than fifteen dollars a month—and that if she should be ill and not able to work in her vegetable garden, and not able to put up all the fruit and vegetables she did every fall, she'd be in a bad way.

And what do you think Lavinia said to me?

"If anything like that should ever happen, Abby," she said, looking at me out of those full, bright, brown eyes of her that never had a spark of human feeling in them, "of course all these people that Peggy has been doing for so many years would see to her. I really think you must be mistaken about her means. She's not a *complete* fool, and no one but a complete fool would give away so much unless she had more laid by. I certainly don't feel that I've got the means to support Peggy. She did me out of my share in my father's house and——"

And then I rose up and I said a few words to Lavinia de Witt and walked out of her house. She never spoke to me afterward, which was no great loss to me. And I will say that I never enjoyed anything in all my life more than I enjoyed telling her exactly what I thought of her!

I told Peggy what I had done, and she was as near angry with me as she could be with any one. She said that she wasn't proud, and that she hoped that fifty years of living in the world had taught her patience and common

sense; but she said she wouldn't touch a penny of her sister Lavinia's money, not if she had to go to the Camden poorhouse.

"After all," she said, "I guess things needn't be so bad even in the poorhouse. There'd always be somebody to talk to, and I think I'd rather stand anything than lonesomeness. Besides, what Lavinia ought to do——" And then she broke off, and all over her wrinkled face and clear up to her big silver-bowed spectacles there ran a little wave of red that made me think of the Peggy Dawson of long ago.

"What ought Lavinia to do?" I asked her. And then I added with a flash of insight: "What have you been asking Lavinia to do?"

Sure enough, I was right. Peggy had actually been up to see Lavinia, to beg her to do something for the De Witt boy—man, of course, by this time! She told her sister that it was a rare piece of injustice that he should be cut out of his father's will, while she, Lavinia, a mere stranger new come into their lives, should inherit. Of course, she might just as well have talked to the red brick and the brownstone of the De Witt house.

Well, it went along like that for a few more years. Peggy's improvident ways grew upon her. It wasn't only the little boys—fresh relays, new generations of them every few years—but it was the tramps that came into Camden with our new railroad line, who knew that there was always something at the kitchen door for them.

"Thank the Lord," said Peggy, "I'm not so poor that I have to deny a glass of milk or a piece of pie to a hungry man passing my house!"

And we all told her that she was inviting nothing less than murder when she encouraged strangers and tramps and ne'er-do-wells to come to her place.

"Why would they want to murder me?" asked old Peggy, her eyes



"Thank the Lord," said Peggy, "I'm not too poor to let the children have a little fruit."

that way inclined, but that she had no right to bring a bad, rough element into the neighborhood.

"She may not have anything worth taking," said Lavinia haughtily, "but there are those that have, and I think the neighborhood ought to warn her to stop her encouraging of thieves and cutthroats."

But the neighborhood only laughed. I think it would have almost been willing to be murdered in its sleep for the sake of being on Peggy's side, and not Lavinia's, in the matter.

And then one week things actually happened—terrible things, dark things, things that brought Crabtree Lane into the newspapers.

In the first place, Ledlie de Witt came

screwed up into a laugh behind her spectacles. "Won't they get more from me alive than they will get from me dead?"

Lavinia was particularly incensed by Peggy's later development. She said quite plainly, so the neighbors told me, that it was all very well for Peggy to court trouble for herself, if she felt

home. He was nearing forty now, and he was a fine, upstanding figure of a man, with no trace of his early wildness upon him. He went straight to Peggy's, and he gladdened her old heart by telling her how her kindness and affection, her unquestioning spirit of belief and generosity, had straightened him out when he was headed the wrong way in his youth.

He told her a lot of things she hadn't heard before—how his father had opposed his desire to be a painter and had tried to make a lawyer out of him; and how, out of the friction and irritation between them, there had grown up on his side a sort of recklessness, and on his father's a sort of sternness and bitterness. He told her how he had pulled himself together after he went back to Europe, and finally he told her that besides her part, another woman had had a share in his regeneration, a young English girl studying art in Paris. And when he was sure enough of himself, certain that he had conquered the evil appetite he had encouraged and that he was able to play a man's part in the world, he and the English girl had been married. They had gone to live in England, and he showed Peggy the pretty pictures of their stone-and-timber house somewhere down in Surrey, and of their round-faced, shy-eyed little English babies.

He admitted that he hadn't become the great artist he had hoped to be, but he said that he had had a happy life for the last few years, which he considered of more account. Only recently, however, some of the investments in which his wife's property was tied up had failed, and he had come over to see if, in view of his reformation, he could obtain some assistance from his father's widow. As he said to Peggy, he had not contested the will because of the estrangement that had existed between him and his father.

"If he hadn't left it to her, he would probably have left it to a home for indigent seamen or something of that sort," he explained.

But now, since he had proved himself worthy of trust, since he needed money, and since Lavinia had more than she could possibly use, he was going to make a plea to her.

He came away from making that plea the angriest man she had ever seen, so Peggy told me. Lavinia had been not only determined to hold on to every cent she possessed, but she had been insulting into the bargain. I don't quite know why—it wasn't Lavinia's way, usually, to waste even words; but she probably felt that she had wronged him, and there was some kind of a belated attempt to justify herself in her own eyes by belittling and insulting him. Peggy said that he was completely overcome with rage, and that he walked up and down over the faded, worn, old carpet of her sitting room, muttering to himself, clenching his fists, stamping every now and then. And then he would apologize to her, and try to control himself for a few minutes, and then he would begin all over again.

He left Camden that evening just before supper. He told Peggy he would come back to see her before he returned to England. He said something about consulting a lawyer in New York as to the possibility of reopening his father's will, although he did not think there was any chance of doing anything there, for the old gentleman had been dead seven or eight years.

"Poor as I am," he cried to Peggy, as she told me later, all his anger seeming to come back upon him again, "I'd be willing to spend all I've got—I'd be willing to do anything—to get even with that arrogant skinflint, my father's widow."

"She's my sister, too, you know," Peggy reminded him gently, though goodness knows she had no reason to

stand up for Lavinia. And he apologized and went away.

Peggy told me she was awfully sorry to see him go, although she had been a little worried while he stayed for fear he wasn't getting all that he might want to eat. Meat was high that season, and Peggy didn't have it more than once or twice a week.

Well, though she could not afford meat every day, she could afford to give away something, whenever she was asked. And Ledlie de Witt had scarcely taken himself off before there came a knock at her side door, and there stood one of her friends, the tramps. He was a big man, with bright blue eyes and a shock of hair partly gray, partly tow-colored, so that you couldn't tell which was which. He spoke with a foreign accent—Peggy didn't know what kind. He asked if she could give him something to eat, and, as it was a bad night, sleety and cold, she let him come in by the kitchen fire, and there she gave him some bread and milk.

He asked her questions concerning the neighborhood, and finally he astonished her very much by inquiring if the Widow Pettingill lived in those parts. Peggy told him that the Widow Pettingill was now the Widow de Witt, and that she lived up at the big house at the corner. Why did the stranger ask about her? Where had he known her? It seemed he had known her years before out on Lou Pettingill's ranch, where he had once been a hand. Then he thanked Peggy for the meal, and said he must be moving on. And he went out into the cold, raw drizzle.

Early the next morning, there was a terrific commotion in Crabtree Lane. The two servants from the De Witt house—Lavinia had dismissed all but two, alleging that she could not afford to keep more—came running into the street, shrieking. And indeed there was a matter to shriek about. Lavinia

sat at her desk in the little room she called her office, with account books and papers before her. She had not gone to bed all night. She was dead.

At first they thought she had had a stroke of apoplexy or heart disease; but when the physicians and the policemen and the coroners came, they found the marks of a terrible blow on the back of her head, just at the base of the brain. That, they said, was what had killed her. And of course the two servants, frightened half out of their wits, remembered and testified to the quarrel she had had with her stepson the day before.

The police telegraphed to the New York police, and Ledlie was found and was brought back to Camden. And then it developed that he had not taken the train to New York that he had told Peggy he intended to take, but had boarded a much later one, about midnight. I will say that it sounded an awfully cock-and-bull story, when he explained that he had missed his early train in order to go out to the cemetery, to visit his mother's grave—on such a day of sleet and drizzle! To wait seven hours for such a thing! It did seem absurd!

Well, you can imagine the excitement in Crabtree Lane, the horror and the gruesome enjoyment of the horror. Only Peggy was completely prostrated. She looked, for the first time, an old woman. But I think it was more grief and fear for Ledlie de Witt than even the awful shock of Lavinia's taking-off that broke her. She insisted that she did not believe he was guilty. And yet even her own evidence before the coroner about his anger and his difficulty in controlling it told against him. He was arrested and put in jail to await the action of the grand jury.

And then, if you please, the really strange thing happened. Peggy was next of kin to Lavinia, of course, and she had to take charge of things in the

big, tragic house, and the lawyers came and searched for Lavinia's will, and no will at all was found! They told Peggy that her sister had been in the habit of making a new one about once in three months. She never could keep her mind settled about who was to be her legatee. She hated to think of leaving all that money to any one. And, as far as they could discover, she had destroyed the last will as she had all previous ones. Indeed, there was evidence among the memoranda found on the desk at which she was sitting that she had been planning a new one.

The lawyers told Peggy, with a smile, that if no will was found, she would inherit her sister's fortune. They added, still with a smile, that in none of the documents which Lavinia had been in the habit of having prepared had Peggy ever been set down for one red cent.

And the very first thing that Peggy did, when it was finally decided that there was no will in existence and that she was heir to all Lavinia's cherished hoard, was to settle the whole of the De Witt part of it upon Ledlie de Witt, his wife, and his children.

"Thank the Lord," said Peggy with shining eyes, "I'm not so poor that I can't afford to be honest! It belongs to them."

The grand jury held Ledlie de Witt for trial. But between the time he was indicted and the time of the trial, what do you suppose happened? There reappeared around Camden a big, blond, Swedish giant of a person, who haunted the waterside saloons, and drank enormous quantities of some kind of Swedish brandy. And he talked, in his cups, about some one he called the Widow Pettingill. He used to be seen occasionally in the neighborhood of the house at the corner of Warburton Avenue and Crabtree Lane, and once, Peggy, running into him, recognized him as her tramp of the evening before Lavinia had been killed.

I suppose people who commit murders are half crazy, anyway. Certainly people who commit murders and can't bear to let other people get the credit and the punishment for them must be crazy. They found that the Swede was insane, in due course of time. But that was not until after he had made an awful scene in a saloon one night, declaring that he and nobody else had done for Lavinia Pettingill, as he persisted in calling her. It had been rankling in his poor wreck of a mind that some one else was getting the glory for a piece of revenge he had been studying out for years and years.

It seems that Lavinia had been the cause of his losing some cattle that Lou Pettingill had promised to give him, to set him up for himself. When Lou had died, Lavinia had repudiated the whole bargain, and the Swede had had no paper to show for it. At first he had just planned in a general way to get even; but as things had gone from bad to worse with him—and, I suppose, as the Swedish brandy had got in one year after another of its fine work—the only way of getting even he had seen was to kill her. And that was what he had done.

Peggy and my oldest granddaughter are over in England, staying with the De Witts now.

"Thank the Lord," said Peggy, when she asked Annabelle to go on the trip, "I'm not so poor now that I can't give you a real present! I've always wanted to."

They got caught over there by the war, and my oldest son, Tom, who is Peggy's lawyer and man of business, says she is drawing pretty heavy drafts against her income. I suppose she is thanking the Lord over there that she is not too poor to help the women and children whose men are at the front.

But don't talk to me about heredity and environment! I've known the Dawson twins.

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Breathing for Health and Beauty

By Doctor Lillian Whitney

Dr. Whitney is always glad to answer all reasonable questions relating to beauty and health, but she cannot undertake to answer letters which fail to inclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope for reply, or to letters inclosing Canadian stamps. Every week she receives many letters of this sort, in spite of the notice always printed at the end of this department. Sometimes, even, the post office sends notification that letters are being held for her, which careless writers have posted with no stamp. If you have failed to receive a reply to your letter, you may know that it is for one of these three reasons.—EDITORS.

WHO does not know of the "Black Hole of Calcutta?" Of one hundred and forty-six English soldiers imprisoned overnight in a small room eighteen feet square, only twenty-three were alive the following morning. These men did not succumb to the tropical heat, but to a condition of blood poisoning from carbonic acid gas—in other words, to the continual inhalation of their own and of one another's poisonous emanations. To a lesser degree, many of us are victims of the same thing, because we shun fresh air, and understand comparatively little about ventilating the blood through a process of breathing whereby the body is cleared of stale, used air—*carbonic acid gas*—and supplied with fresh, pure air—*oxygen*.

Oxygen is the breath of life. It is also the flame whereby the complexion is richly colored—even into old age when the subject is one of those so fortunate as to possess a love for fresh air and a capacity for bathing the fluids of the body in it. It is the flame whereby the combustion of food is translated into nourishment and warmth.

It may be of interest to some young readers, and so an inducement to them to seek more of nature's elixir, to learn of a few simple laboratory experiments

that illustrate the flamelike property of this powerful element:

(1) A piece of smoldering charcoal placed in a jar of oxygen bursts into flame, burning vividly.

(2) A small piece of dry phosphorus, warmed in a deflagration spoon and plunged into oxygen, burns with a brilliancy painful to the eye.

(3) A steel watch spring tipped at one end with burning sulphur, when placed in oxygen, burns with intense light and emits sparks.

This is what fresh, pure air—that is, air that contains its full quota of oxygen—does for us. When the processes of the body are in splendid form through rapid oxidation, all waste is quickly eliminated. There are then no stagnant recesses of polluted matter hidden or lurking in any part of it.

Could those poor soldiers in the Black Hole have had only a whiff of fresh air and five minutes in which to yawn and stretch—thus freeing the system, through the lungs, of its accumulated waste and reoxygenating the blood—they would have been revived and doubtless have lived to see the dawn of another day. The despised yawn is really nature's cry for fresh air!

We yawn when we are bored, when we are drowsy, when we feel stupid,

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because the system contains an excess of carbon dioxide and requires some activity to get rid of it. Sometimes the yawn is unproductive of good results, unless a window is opened to let in fresh air. How grateful this is! We have very little consideration for guests when we demand their best in a poorly ventilated room. Who has not observed how the attention flags at any entertainment, no matter how absorbing the topic, as soon as the air becomes vitiated, and how stimulated we become upon its renewal?

Auto-intoxication, from reabsorption into the system of noxious odors, gases, and fluids that fill the body when life's processes are indifferently performed, becomes an impossible condition if the breathing apparatus is fully developed and conscientiously used.

As every one knows, science has latterly been digging around to find out why some children who appear normal are really defective in so many respects; why, for instance, a girl whose parents are healthy, and whose brothers and sisters have no glaring signposts of deficiencies, fails to develop upon reaching the age of puberty. When laboratory methods are applied to such a child and her lung capacity is tested by means of a spirometer, it is frequently discovered that she is deplorably lacking in this respect—that her breathing capacity is way below the mark, that her blood has never been properly aerated and her tissue oxygenation is so feeble that it scarcely sustains life!

Again, a boy of brilliant ancestry, well developed muscularly, is possessed of an irate temper, hates to study, dislikes his teachers, will not concentrate on anything worth while, is even averse to cleanliness of body and clothes. The spirometer reveals the cause—his lung capacity is startlingly poor, and the air poverty of his brain cells accounts for his trying perversities. A changed boy

develops in six months as a result of open-air treatment and of breathing gymnastics.

It is believed that fully seventy-five per cent—even more—of all children are lacking in lung capacity. If this were fully realized and parents awakened to the need of the system for fresh, pure air, the interest of children could be quickly aroused and they would make an effort to develop a fine pair of bellows—lungs—with which to fan the flame of life.

The result would be new health and new beauty—beauty of face, form, and of character. That good character is dependent primarily upon good health for its support does not occur to the average parent, even though these school tests have to do largely with defective children whose physical shortcomings create marked moral delinquencies. Unless a child is so unruly that he cannot be controlled at home, he is not regarded as unhealthy. Those interested in this subject show that vice and crime in city-bred adolescents can be directly traced to the influence of sewers, gas mains, and belching chimneys! The effect of foul air upon growing children has been carefully investigated in our large cities, and the painful fact observed that moral obliquities go hand in hand with physical defects.

Of course there can be no question of this. It is well known that imbecility and mouth breathing are correlated. Undeveloped beings, such as idiots, children, and infants—also the vulgar, stupid boor, and the immature—breathe mainly through the mouth. The most perfected method of human respiration is through the nose, the nose being one of the most highly distinguished organs of a superior race. When the air is inhaled through the nose, it is warmed, moistened, and purified, prior to reaching the tissue of the lungs, Eustachian tube and middle ear.

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The mouth breather, indulging in a perverse habit, has a characteristic facial expression. The mouth hangs partly open; there is a dull, heavy look about the eyes, and a general appearance of stupidity. The lack of proper ventilation of the lungs will soon be evidenced, too, in symptoms of impaired nutrition. The mouth breather is frail and ill-nourished in appearance, perhaps below the average height and weight, and his chest is thin and flat.

A variety of symptoms arising from insufficient supply of air may be observed—such as headache, lassitude, and inability to study or to do anything requiring mental concentration. Deep, powerful nasal breathing, then, stands in close relationship to high thinking.

The importance, therefore, of examining children as to their respiratory capacity cannot be overestimated, for a deficiency tends to weakness of all the

moral and mental powers, to consumption, and to early death. When children display small nostrils, flat, narrow chests, a pallid color, feeble circulation, small recuperative powers, they also lack discrimination in odors and atmospheres, are very susceptible to the invasion of disease, and have little capacity for the enjoyment of life.

The lungs, then, perform the most important function of the body, and the nose is the facial register of these internal organs. So one in whom this function is beautifully developed, either

normally or by cultivation, will display large nostrils; a high broad nose; pink ears; clear, sparkling, sometimes dazzling eyes; a good, fresh color of the complexion, with clearness and purity of the skin; red lips and gums; a wholesome appetite for food and drink; sprightly motions, lively gestures, a hopeful and cheerful expression of the face, a well-nourished body, and a lively gait. Is it worth while?

Now, while it is never too late to

begin, the foundations of beauty and health are laid in childhood, indeed in infancy, and the practice lately advised by many physicians and carried out by conscientious mothers of keeping their babies in the open air day and night cannot be too highly praised. These children exhibit a physical development and a delightful rosiness in sharp contrast to their little comrades whose parents are not "fresh-air fiends," as some



The yawn—nature's demand for fresh air.

whose contracted views are dependent upon just such a lack and love of fresh, pure air indelicately term those who heed the advice given them.

It might be supposed that, even in the case of a mouth breather, a sufficient supply of oxygen for the full demands of the body could be taken in; however, this is not the case. It was pointed out in previous papers that the body does not depend for its nourishment entirely upon the food consumed. Food remains comparatively inert unless combustion—oxygenation—is suf-



Position for special breathing exercise.

ficiently rapid to burn it up. And then, too, mouth breathers, because of their defective olfactory and gustatory senses, have very poorly developed appetites, nor do they enjoy food in the normal manner. A defective breathing apparatus is just as inimical to a healthy appetite, as foul air destroys a taste for food. Darwin experimented "on the dog" and found that a puppy whose olfactories are blunted will not suckle. And the sharp hunger and keen delight for savory odors engendered by a long, brisk walk in the open country, or by life in the open, are well known.

Children with a defective breathing apparatus, as well as *precocious* children who possess abnormal mental endowments at the expense of their physical growth, often succumb in childhood for want of fresh air and

exercise. These children, particularly, should spend most of the day out of doors, in such occupations and athletics as are seasonable. Skating, for instance, in winter is the acme of splendid exercise for those seeking a beautiful development. Both young and old children love this exhilarating exercise. Playing in the snow, ice hockey, and a dozen other winter sports can be provided at this time of the year to delight the hearts of children and to expand them mentally and physically. If their elders would enter with keen zest in these same enjoyments, there really would be little need for special exercises to develop the chest, because nature takes care of this when given the tools—fresh air and exercise.

Simply to breathe freely in the open air is not sufficient.

One must make the lungs *work* in order to distend them. By this means the bony walls of the thorax will be made to respond to the normal rhythmical expansions and contractions called *respiration*, and even though defective in early childhood, in time this malleable truncated cone will yield to the force within and mold itself according to the beautiful curves designed by nature.

During the adolescent stage, both girls and boys frequently become muscle poor and show isolated winglike structures of the shoulders that are fatal to beauty. Unless precautions are taken, permanent deformity may result, with compression of the lung tissue, and disease of the lungs may follow. Prominence of the collar bone, with knoblike bony eminences at their point of articulation with the breastbone, is connected with imperfect de-

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velopment of the apices of the lungs. It must be remembered that the apex of each lung extends up beyond the collar bone. This portion of the lung is more often the initial seat of tubercular invasion than any other part, because the tubercle bacilli can find an undisturbed resting place there, and also because the lung tissue in this situation has less resisting power, since it is called into action so little.

Well-developed, well-expanded lung tissue that demands an abundance of fresh, pure air all of the time results in such splendid physical vitality, with such marvelous resisting power, that disease germs can make no headway, even though they invade the lungs. Post-mortem examinations reveal the startling fact that every one has some tuberculosis. The reason this dread disease has not more victims is just because the breathing capacity and hence the quality of the blood and general resistance are greater in some bodies than in others.

Years ago, the value of out-of-door breathing as a means of combating and overcoming tuberculosis was made famous by the late Doctor Trudeau. Himself a tubercular patient, he spent the greater part of a long and distinguished life at Lake Saranac, rekindling and refanning into flame the spark of life in countless grateful numbers, among them Robert Louis Stevenson.

The chest contains only the heart and lungs, while all the other viscera lie in the abdomen, subsidiary, as it were, to these, and cut off from them, one might say, by the most powerful muscle in the body—the diaphragm, so shaped that it raises and lowers, not only the chest walls, expelling waste and drawing in repair, but the abdominal viscera, too. Diaphragmatic breathing is the only breathing that insures beauty. We can have a fair degree of health with costal breathing, but the body remains indifferently ventilated.

The beauty of the skin depends entirely upon the blood, and the blood cannot be properly aerated in rooms that are habitually "close" or when shallow or indifferent breathing—even with plenty of fresh air—is one's custom. The skin soon becomes yellow, loses its freshness, its *tone*, and is subject to unpleasant eruptions and discolorations. The hair, too, is dependent upon the blood for its growth, vigor, and luster, and bright red blood is possible only when the lungs are exercised to their full capacity.

The following special diaphragmatic breathing exercises will point the way. They originated with a famous psychological teacher. The amount of benefit to be derived from them depends as much upon the manner of exhaling as upon that of inhaling.

Breathing exercises require plenty of fresh air; therefore the windows should be open, that the air in the room may be changed. The body must be perfectly free from any tight-fitting garments or bands during the practice. The exercises should not be practiced under three hours after eating. The best time is in the morning after rising, and each exercise should not be done more than three or four times.

Exercise 1: Stand erect. Place one hand just below the shoulder blades and the other over the pit of the stomach. Take a deep, energetic breath *through the nostrils, without lifting the shoulders*, and breathe out against the hands as if trying to push them away. Retain the breath five seconds; then exhale through the smallest possible opening in the lips in *short, vigorous blasts*, making the dynamic stroke with the lower part of the chest walls. In no instance should the shoulders and chest be allowed to rise and fall when breathing. Repeat this exercise three times, which is sufficient at any one time.

Exercise 2: Stand erect. Take a

round stick three feet in length; hold it firmly in both hands at the extreme ends; take the center breath—or solar plexus—as in Exercise 1. This breath must be taken vigorously. At the same time, with a quick, energetic motion, *lift the stick above the head at arms' length.* The position of the body is that of being suspended from a bar. Sway the body from side to side, at the same time stretching the body upward, as if trying to lift it off the hips. *Keep the feet firmly on the floor.* Now bring the stick down as far as you can across the shoulder blades. Exhale in one long blast, resisting through compressed lips as in Exercise 1. During this entire exercise, the *breath must be held* until time for exhalation, i. e. seven seconds. Repeat this exer-

cise; then do Exercise 1. This exercise is good also for increasing the height.

Exercise 3: Stand erect. Take a full breath energetically through the nostrils, at the same time throwing the arms violently *forward and upward* at an angle of sixty degrees. While taking the breath and throwing the arms upward, take a step forward and incline the body in the direction of the arms. Retain this position seven seconds, holding the breath; then move back to the erect position. Bring the arms down with energy and allow them to rest in front of the body, with the hands on the tips of the shoulders. Exhale slowly through tightly compressed lips, pushing out the lower chest walls. Repeat this, then do Exercise 1.

Answers to Queries

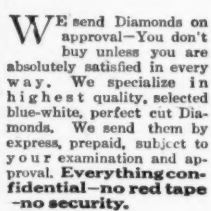
JASPER K. C.—The Freudian school of psychoanalysis refers to a scientific study of dreams as formulated by Doctor Sigmund Freud of Vienna. Psychoanalysis is a new method of arriving at diagnoses through an analytical study of the patient's dream life, or, to put it more clearly, of the patient's subconsciousness as disclosed in dreams. The higher consciousness, concerned with the hurly-burly of external matters, forgets much that is not of apparent moment, but the subconscious mind forgets nothing. The minutest affairs through which we have lived leave their impress on this, which is the true mind. Many physical ills spring from unexpressed, repressed, and long-hidden psychic hopes and desires that are revealed in dreams. The entire subject is highly complex, and both near and remote in its scope. The analysis of dreams is very ancient indeed, but the scientific interpretation of man's inner being through his dreams, with the application of the knowledge so arrived at, as a therapeutic measure for healing purposes is distinctly new, while the study of psychology and of pathological psychology by all who read is also distinctly new and a product of our exotic times.

M. O.—Perhaps your skin is naturally swarthy. If so, very little can be done to

lighten it, but much can be done to keep it in perfect health and thereby make it beautiful. I have referred to and emphasized this fact again and again and shall dilate upon it in an article soon to appear, entitled, "Minor Skin Conditions." Of course, discolorations that result from exposure to sun and air—especially salt air—to indiscretions in diet, to cosmetics, can be remedied. You must reconstruct your diet and cleanse out your system with a liver and intestinal tonic laxative. Stimulation of the liver is what you dark-skinned people require above all other things, because this extraordinary gland is usually sluggish and reflects its condition upon the skin. You should take deep diaphragmatic exercises, concerning which I shall also have more to say in a future article.

These are so often things you do not want to be told about. You want to continue the error of your ways and be given an application that will make your skin "lily white," is it not so? This is the way of all young girls! Well, you can use an arsenical bleach, but you must send to me for the formula, and you can apply a liquid powder on dress occasions, but you can *cultivate* and *attain* a beautiful skin throughout life by practicing the laws of hygiene. Nothing else is of lasting benefit. Which will you have?

Doctor Whitney will be glad to answer, free of charge, all reasonable questions relating to beauty and health. Private replies will be sent to those inclosing a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Do not send Canadian stamps or coins. Address: Beauty Department, SMITH'S MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York.



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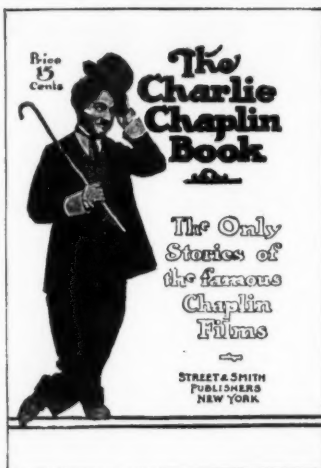
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